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# IRELAND: ITS SAINTS & SCHOLARS

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## FLOOD



Irene Owen Andrews

December 1922





IRELAND :: :: ITS  
SAINTS & SCHOLARS







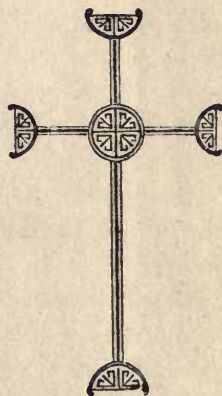
High Cross of Monasterboice.



# RELAND :: ITS SAINTS AND SCHOLARS

BY J. M. FLOOD

Author of  
"Ireland: Its Myths and Legends"



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## PREFACE

This book is intended as a companion work, and, in some sense, a sequel of a small volume recently written by me, entitled *Ireland: Its Myths and Legends*. The publishers were desirous of having the early Christian period of Irish history treated in the same manner as the pagan period had been treated in its forerunner, and *Ireland: Its Saints and Scholars* represents the attempt to give within a small compass a concise survey of the most glorious epoch in the annals of our country.

The subject is a vast and an extremely important one. A great deal of study and research has been given to it by learned and devoted workers, and a great amount of literary and archæological research still remains to be done before we can assure ourselves that we have gained a really comprehensive view of Early Christian Ireland. The size of this volume will not therefore be taken as the author's measure of the importance of a period of history of surpassing human interest, and the book itself is only intended as an introduction to the study of larger and more ambitious treatises covering the same ground.

No useful purpose could be served by overloading with references a book of this kind which is intended for popular use. I have not, however, spared any pains in consulting the various authorities, Irish, English, French, and German, who have written on this subject, and while reference is not always made to the sources from which information is derived, there is no statement in the book which cannot be substantiated by learned and thoroughly competent authorities. Dr. Healy's 'Ireland's Ancient Schools and Scholars' contains a mine of information, and he treats the subject in a manner at once learned and popular. Professor Zimmer's "*Ueber die Bedeutung des irischen Elements für die Mittelalterliche Cultur*" is an important contribution to the history of the influence of Irish thought on the Continent from the fifth to the twelfth century. Père Gougaud's '*Les Chretientés Celtiques*' is, perhaps, the ablest and most authoritative study which has yet been published on the Early Irish Church, a work which combines the most painstaking and up-to-date research with the lucidity and clearness of presentation which is a characteristic of French litterateurs. Miss Margaret Stokes' '*Sketch of Early Christian Art in Ireland*' though written thirty years ago, has not yet in any degree diminished in value by the publication of subsequent and larger books on the subject, and the



author's deep and unique knowledge of Irish Archæology will always make her work extremely useful to students. Every modern writer on Irish history owes much to the splendid work of Dr. P. W. Joyce.

While I have endeavoured to be concise, I have at the same time striven to omit nothing essential, and I hope I have been able to give my readers a fairly comprehensive idea of a splendid period in our national history. I may say, in the words of St. Columbanus, that I wished to include everything, but I found it impossible to compress everything within a small compass. There is much reason to believe that, in trying to make a selection from a great amount of material, and to combine the net results of great learning and research into a small volume, faults both of commission and omission may have occurred. It is consolatory, therefore, to reflect that the most competent judges of such a book as this, will undoubtedly be its kindest critics, since they who can most easily detect any errors that may have occurred, will also be most capable of judging its difficulty. Any effort that has been expended in the writing of the book has been more than rewarded by the closer study which its preparation has entailed of some of the greatest personalities that have lived and worked in Ireland. Dr. Healy remarks with truth that while we speak glibly of the Saints and

Scholars of the early times, we know, in general, very little about them, and that the information concerning them is contained in volumes not easily accessible to the general reader. The author hopes that the present little work may in some degree supply this deficiency.

The greatest results may be expected from a closer knowledge of first centuries of the Faith in Ireland. In the words of a distinguished Irishman, it is no vain or retrogressive study for Ireland to look back and ponder well upon her old Christian past. The lessons that can be learned from that distant time can never be out of date, no matter what may happen in the world, or who may come or go in it; for they teach eternal truths—they are indeed the sole needs of men and nations. Education, industry, knowledge of the arts, the practice of justice, temperance, fortitude, judgment and mercy. Above all, they teach the beauty and the power of faith in God, and of the unselfish labour for the welfare of His creatures. "And let us remember," continues Sir William Butler, "that these old teachers belonged entirely to us. It was not a strange race of beings, who thus toiled and taught, and triumphed—they were our own glorious people. The dust of many of them is in our midst, and the simple words in which they asked our prayers, can still be read upon their mouldering tombstones."

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*Many of the illustrations in this  
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# IRELAND :: :: ITS SAINTS & SCHOLARS

## CHAPTER I.

### The Island of Saints and Scholars

The sixth and seventh centuries of the Christian era must be regarded as the Golden Age of Ireland. The story of our country during this period is one of the most glorious epochs in the history of European Christianity. St. Patrick had not been half a century in his grave when the whole island was studded with the monasteries and schools of the new faith. The doctrines of Christianity were received by the people with a burst of enthusiasm which has scarcely been equalled in the history of any nation. Learning became the handmaid of Faith, and art and letters followed rapidly in the train of the churches and monasteries. While Science and Sacred Studies were almost extinguished on the Continent owing to the victorious advance of the Goths and Vandals, and the civilisation of the East became the prey of Islam,

## 2 IRELAND : ITS SAINTS AND SCHOLARS

Ireland was the secure abode of European culture. Armagh, Clonard, Durrow, Bangor and Clonmacnoise were at this time the Universities of the West, and the great centres from which the spiritual life was once again to be renewed in Europe.

At this time Ireland came to be known as 'The Island of Saints and Scholars' and the noble work which Irishmen accomplished for religion and learning securely vindicates her claim to this splendid title. The energy and enthusiasm which were awakened throughout the country by the preaching of the Gospel could not be contained within the limits of Ireland itself. Montalembert notes as one of the most striking characteristics of the Irish monks their passion for pilgrimage and preaching, and the imperious necessity which seemed to impel them to spread themselves over Western Europe, seeking and carrying knowledge and faith afar, and of penetrating into the most distant regions, to watch and combat paganism. St. Bernard speaks of the multitude of saintly men who descended from Ireland on the Continent like an overflowing stream. They threw themselves with the fiery enthusiasm of their race into the struggle with the mass of heathenism that was threatening the existence of the Christian world. So splendid was their success, and so prominent a part did they play in the re-establishment of the faith amongst foreign nations, that, in the striking words of John Richard Green, it seemed for a time as if the world's history was to be changed,

and as if Celtic, and not Latin Christianity, was to mould the destinies of the churches of the West. Another historian writes that from Iceland to the Danube and the Appenines, among Frank or Burgundian or Lombard, the Irish energy appeared omnipotent and inexhaustible.\*

“During the sixth and seventh centuries in Ireland,” says Dr. Dollinger, “the Church of Ireland stood in the full beauty of its bloom. The spirit of the Gospel operated amongst the people with a vigorous and vivifying power; troops of holy men from the highest to the lowest ranks of society, obeyed the holy Gospels of Christ, and forsook all things that they might follow Him. There was not a country of the world during this period, which could boast of pious foundations or of religious communities equal to those that adorned this far distant island. Amongst the Irish, the doctrines of the Christian Religion were preserved pure and entire; the names of heresy and schism were not known to them; and in the Bishop of Rome they acknowledged and venerated the Supreme Head of the Church on earth, and continued with him, and through him with the whole Church, in a never interrupted communion. The schools in the Irish cloisters were at the time the most celebrated in the West. While almost the whole of Europe was desolated by war, peaceful Ireland, free from the invasion of external foes, opened to the lovers of learning and piety a welcome asylum. The strangers who visited

\*Lane-Poole: “Studies in the History of Mediæval Thought.”

#### 4 IRELAND : ITS SAINTS AND SCHOLARS

Ireland, not only from the neighbouring shores of Britain, but also from the remote nations of the Continent, received from the Irish people the most hospitable reception, a gratuitous entertainment, free instruction, and even the books that were necessary for their studies. Thus in the year 536, in the time of St. Senanus, there arrived at Cork from the Continent, fifteen monks who were led thither by their desire to perfect themselves in the practices of an ascetic life under Irish directors, and to study the Sacred Scriptures in the schools established near the city. At a later period the Anglo-Saxons passed over to Ireland in great numbers for the same laudable purpose. On the other hand many holy and learned Irishmen left their own country to proclaim the faith, to establish or to reform monasteries in distant lands, and thus to become the benefactors of almost every nation in Europe."

The mere summary of the names of the best known of the Irish missionaries is sufficient to show how great and wide was the influence which they exercised on other nations. St. Columcille founded the celebrated monastery of Iona, which spread the knowledge of the Gospel amongst the Picts of the Scotch mainland. At the time of his death forty-one missions had been established, twenty-five amongst the Scots, and eighteen in the country of the Picts. His monks went to all the islands of the west coast of Scotland, and there is scarcely one of these islands that does not acknowledge an Irishman as the founder of its



church. Cormac, a disciple of St. Columcille, visited the Orkneys, and there were settlements of the Irish monks on the Faroe and Shetland Islands. Further north they went to Iceland, and when the Northmen first discovered that island they found there books and other traces of the early Irish Church. Aidan, a monk from Iona, founded the great monastery of Lindisfarne and spread Christianity through the kingdom of Northumberland and the North of England. Finnian and Colman, his successors, carried on the work begun by Aidan and brought the faith to Mercia and East Anglia. St. Columbanus went through France, founding monasteries at Luxeuil, Fontaines and Annegrai; then passing through Switzerland, he crossed the Alps to build the famous Abbey of Bobbio in Lombardy. Jonas, his contemporary and biographer, tells us that from Luxeuil alone over six hundred missionaries went to Bavaria. St. Gall, one of the companions of St. Columbanus, laboured in Switzerland, and established a monastery near the lake of Constance on the site of the town that still bears his name. St. Killian became the Apostle of Franconia and Thuringia, and St. Colman is the Patron Saint of Lower Austria. St. Fridolin, the first Bishop of Alsace, worked at Glarus where his figure still finds place on the cantonal arms and banner. St. Frigidian who converted the Lombards and became Bishop of Lucca, and St. Donatus, the first Bishop of Fiesole, were both Irishmen. In Southern Italy St. Cathaldus of Lismore became the Bishop and

Patron Saint of Tarentum. Marianus Scotus, on his pilgrimage to Rome, stopped at Regensburg on the Danube and founded a monastery, out of which there grew twelve Irish convents in Germany and Austria. The Irish missionaries did not confine themselves to Europe, for we find one of them named Augustine residing at Carthage, and writing a treatise on the Sacred Scriptures, while at the same time two of his countrymen Baetan and Mainchine taught in the same city.

As the sixth and seventh centuries were the great period of the Irish Saints and Missionaries, so in the eighth and ninth centuries the Scholars from Ireland became famous throughout the West of Europe. In the ninth century Irishmen were to be found in every cathedral and monastery of the empire, and were so identified with the new intellectual movement which was then taking place that the teaching of the scholars was called the Irish learning. They went in great numbers to France, and a distinguished French savant writes that in the time of Charlemagne nearly all the learned men of the empire were of Irish origin.† Their name is inseparably associated with the foundation of the Carolovingian Schools, an event of the greatest importance in the history of civilisation, since it marked the commencement of the attempt to recover for Europe all that it had lost by the inroads of the Goths and Vandals. A

†Scaliger le Jeune: "Du temps de Charlemagne 'omnes fere docti' etaient d'Irlande."

great French writer† has described the letter which Charlemagne sent to his mayors, recommending them to found schools, as the Charter of Modern Thought. It marked the beginning of an intellectual renaissance in Europe in no way inferior in importance to the humanistic movement of the fifteenth century. Although Tiraboschi in his ‘History of Italian Literature’ claims the honour of the Carolovingian revival for Italy, the greatest part of the credit is, as Renan points out, due to Irish scholars. It was Italy, indeed, that inspired Charlemagne with the idea of founding schools, but it was Ireland that sent him masters to impart the new learning. Charlemagne and Charles the Bald have given the name Carolovingian to this period of revival of letters, but the revival itself had commenced before their time by the emigration to France of learned Irishmen, whom Renan calls “les colonisateurs scientifiques de l’Europe Occidentale.”

The annals of the period fully justify the claim which Renan makes for the Irish scholars. In the chronicles of the reign of Charlemagne there is mention made of how two of these learned Scots were brought before the Emperor. They had arrived at the coast of Gaul in company with British merchants, and were “men learned beyond compare as well in secular as in sacred writings.” They had none of the ordinary objects of merchandise for sale, but kept crying to the crowd who came to buy, “If any man is desirous of

†Renan: “Sur l’étude de la langue Grecque au Moyen age.”

wisdom let him come to us and receive it, for we have it to sell.”\* Eric of Auxerre writing in the middle of the ninth century a dedication to Charles the Bald of a poem on St. Germanus of Auxerre, testifies to the nationality of the majority of the men of learning then in France. “What need is there,” he writes, “to speak of Ireland, which sets at naught the peril of the sea, and migrates almost in one body to our shores, with its crowds of philosophers who voluntarily subject themselves to exile.” At one and the same time we find John Scotus Erigena lecturing at the Royal School at Paris, Sedulius Scotus and Findan teaching at Liège and Rheinau, and the Irish Abbot Moengal, who was famed alike for his knowledge of theology and secular science, presiding over the great monastery of St. Gall at a period when it was one of the foremost schools in Europe. Clemens, an Irishman, was tutor to the future Emperor Lothaire and continued his labours at the court seminary after Charlemagne’s death. His reputation was so great that the Abbot of Fulda sent some of his best pupils from the monastery to study grammar under the Irish monk, and he is known in the court records as Instructor of the Imperial Court. Dungal, another Irishman, gained fame as a theologian, an astronomer and a poet. “Dungal, John Scotus, Clemens, Sedulius and Moengal,” writes Zimmer, “are representatives of a higher culture than was to be found in the Continent of their day; to a

\*Gesta Carolomanni I.I. Pertz 2-731.



purely Christian training, and a severely simple habit of mind, they joined the highest theoretical attainments, based upon a thorough knowledge of the best standards of classical antiquity. These Irishmen had a high mission entrusted to them, and they faithfully accomplished their task.”†

†Zimmer: “The Irish Element in Mediæval Culture.”

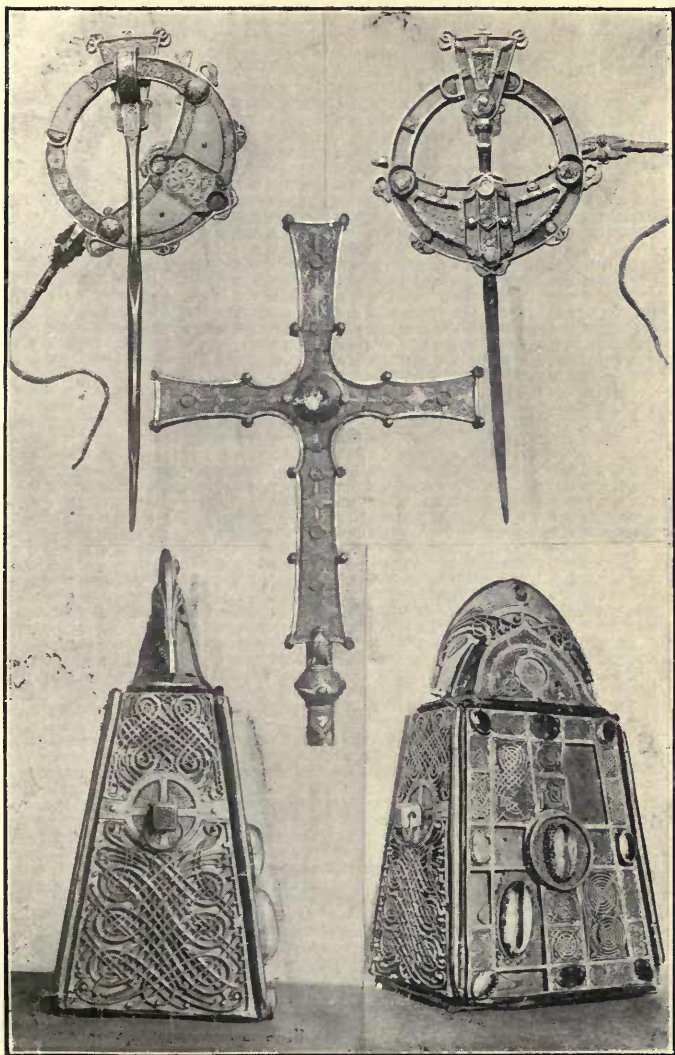


Initial letter “L.”  
 “Irish Tract” Lib., Trin. Coll., Dub.

## CHAPTER II.

### The Coming of St. Patrick

Towards the end of the fourth, and at the beginning of the fifth century, King Niall of the Nine Hostages went on successive expeditions against the peoples of Gaul and Britain. Amongst the captives brought back from one of these foreign raids was Succoth, a lad of sixteen, the son of a Decurion Calpurnius, and his wife Conchessa, who was a relative of the great St. Martin of Tours. The boy Succoth, afterwards called Patricius, probably in allusion to his noble birth, was sold as a slave in Ireland, and employed by his master Milcho to tend his cattle on the slopes of Slieve Mish in Antrim. In the sadness of his captivity in a strange land, and whilst he ate the salt bread of servitude a profound spiritual change came over his mind, and his thoughts turned to the Christian teaching of his childhood. "I was not," he tells us himself, "from my childhood a believer in God, but continued in death and unbelief until I was severely chastened: and in truth I have been humbled by hunger and nakedness, and it was my lot to traverse Ireland every day sore against my will, until I was almost



Tara Brooch (Back).

Tara Brooch (Front).

Cross of Cong.

Shrine of St. Patrick's Bell (End). Shrine of St. Patrick's Bell (Front)

*From photographs kindly supplied by the National Museum.*





exhausted. But this proved rather a benefit to me, because by means of it I have been corrected by the Lord, and He has fitted me for being at this day what was once far from me, so that I should interest or concern myself about the salvation of others, when I used to have no such thoughts even for myself."

He tells us further in his 'Confession' that he was employed every day in feeding cattle, and that frequently in the day he used to have recourse to prayer, and that the love of God was thus growing stronger and stronger, and His fear and faith were increasing in him, so that in a single day he would give utterance to as many as an hundred prayers, and in the night almost as many. He used to remain in the woods and on the mountains and would rise for prayer before daylight, in the midst of snow and ice and rain, feeling no injury, nor was there any sloth in him, because the Spirit within was fervent. After six years' captivity Patrick escaped from Ireland to France and made his way to Tours, where he stayed for four years receiving instructions from St. Martin. Then he spent about fourteen years with St. Germanus of Auxerre, who sent him to Pope Celestine to receive the episcopacy. The Saint's thoughts often turned towards the people amongst whom he had spent the years of his captivity, and he was finally induced to undertake the conversion of Ireland by a vision. "I saw in the visions of the night a person coming from Ireland with innumerable letters, and he gave me one of them, and I read

in the beginning of the letter ‘The voice of the people of Ireland,’ and I thought at that very moment that I heard the voice of those who were near the wood of Focluth, which is adjoining to the Western Sea, and they cried out, as it were with one voice, ‘We entreat thee, holy youth, to come and walk still amongst us,’ and I was very much pricked to the heart, and could read no further, and so I awoke. Thanks be to God the Lord who, after very many years, had granted to them according to their cry.”

St. Patrick received authority from Pope Celestine to undertake the Irish mission, and commenced his apostolate in the year 432, when Laery was Ard Righ of Ireland. He landed in the Co. Meath, a little south of Drogheda. He was received hospitably by a chieftain of the district, who, on hearing from him an explanation of the Christian Faith, became a convert with his wife and family. Shortly afterwards, the Saint one day weary from fatigue lay down to rest, and the chieftain’s son, a fair-haired boy of gentle bearing, strewed flowers round the head of the Saint, and then sat at his feet. The companions of St. Patrick rebuked the lad for thus disturbing the bishop’s rest, but the Saint, waking from his slumber, corrected them, saying: “Leave him so, he shall be the heir of my kingdom.” Afterwards the boy, whom St. Patrick named Benignus on account of his gentle and kindly nature, succeeded the Saint as Bishop of Armagh.

Following the course of the Boyne St. Patrick

arrived at the Hill of Slane on Easter eve, and lighted his paschal fire at nightfall in preparation for the festival. The Ard Righ was holding a great pagan celebration on the neighbouring Hill of Tara at the same time, and the law forbade any other fire to be lit throughout the kingdom before the great fire should be kindled on Tara. St. Patrick's fire was seen by the King and his followers, and Laery asked who had thus dared to disobey the ancient law. His Druids warned him that unless the fire were immediately extinguished, it would never be put out in Erin, and Laery set out with a large force to Slane. He summoned the Saint to appear before him, and ordered that no one should show him respect by rising to receive him. Erc, one of the King's followers, disobeyed his order, saluted St. Patrick with respect, and became a believer. Laery listened to the Saint's explanation of the Easter celebration, and then desiring to hear him speak further regarding the Christian faith, told him to appear before him at Tara on the following day.

On Easter Sunday St. Patrick went to Tara with his companions to receive audience from the King in his Hall of Justice. As they went along he chanted the beautiful hymn, which has become known as the 'Breastplate of St. Patrick,' in order to protect himself and his followers from the dangers by which they were encompassed. When he entered the King's presence Dubtach, the chief poet, rose to do him reverence, and afterwards became a zealous Christian. St. Patrick preached

on the fundamental truths of Christianity to Laery and his court, and answered all the objections of the Druids. The wife and daughters of the King, and his brother Criffan became Christians, and Laery, although he remained a pagan, gave the Saint permission to preach and make converts throughout his kingdom. St. Patrick spent some time at Tara, and then went to Tailten, where the great annual games were being held. There he made many converts amongst the clans who were assembled to celebrate the festival of Lugh of the Long Arm. Leaving some of his companions to carry on the mission in Meath, the Saint himself went westward, passing through Granard and Cavan. At Magh Slecht, or the 'Plain of Adoration' in Cavan, he found the people worshipping the idol Crom Cruach and twelve lesser idols which surrounded it. St. Patrick had these idols of the Druidical rite destroyed, and founded a church near the place. Passing over the Shannon he directed his course to Rathcroghan, the residence of the Kings of Connacht.

When the Saint and his attendants assembled at early morning at Clebach, a well on the east side of Rathcroghan, they found there Ethnea and Felimia, two daughters of King Laery, who were in fosterage in Connacht. The story of their conversion is told in the Book of Armagh. The sisters at first thought that St. Patrick and his white-robed companions were *Duine Sidhe* or fairies, and inquired who they were, and from whence they



had come. St. Patrick told them that it were better for them to confess to the true God than to inquire concerning the race and the country of himself and his followers. Then the maidens questioned him concerning God, asking who was He, and where He dwelt, in heaven, or earth, in the sea, or the rivers, in the mountains or valleys? Was He ever-living and beautiful? Did many foster His son, and were His daughters dear and beautiful to men of the earth? How was He to be seen and loved, and was it in youth or old age that He was to be found? St. Patrick told them that the God of whom he was come to preach to them was the God of all men, the God of heaven and earth, of the seas and rivers, of the sun, moon, and all stars, of the high mountains and lowly valleys. He was the God who was above heaven, and in heaven, and under heaven. He had a habitation in heaven, in the sea, and all that were therein. He inspired all things, quickened all things, was over all things, sustained all things, gave the light to the sun, made springs in a dry ground, and islands in the sea. He had a Son co-eternal and co-equal with Himself. The Son was not younger than the Father, nor was the Father older than the Son, and the Holy Ghost breathed in them. The Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost were not divided. The Saint also told them that he desired to unite them to the Heavenly King, and the maidens asked him that he would teach them diligently how they might believe in Him and how they might see Him face

to face. St. Patrick asked them did they believe that by baptism they put off the sin of their father and mother; did they believe in repentance after sin, in life after death, in the Resurrection at the Day of Judgment, and in the unity of the Church? The two sisters professed their belief in all these, and the Saint baptized them, and put a white garment on their heads. Then they asked him that they might see the face of Christ, and St. Patrick replied that they could not see the face of Christ except they received the sacrifice and tasted of death. They begged that they might receive the sacrifice and behold the Son, their spouse. They received the Eucharist of God from the hands of the Saint, and slept in death. "And they were laid out on one bed, covered with garments; and (their friends) made great lamentation and weeping for them."

From Rathcroghan, St. Patrick went to Mayo, and spent the forty days of Lent on the summit of Croagh Patrick in fasting and prayer. In Tyrawley he baptised the seven sons of Awley, brother of King Dathi, and a great number of their followers. He spent seven years in Connacht, and then went through the midlands of Ireland towards Munster. At Cashel the royal residence of the Munster Kings he was met by Aengus, King of the Province, with his brehons and chieftains. Aengus and his followers embraced Christianity. While St. Patrick was baptizing Aengus, the pastoral staff which he held, and which terminated in a spike, pierced the King's sandalled foot.

Aengus, imagining that the pain which he bore was part of the rite, submitted patiently to the wound which the saint, unwittingly, inflicted. Then St. Patrick went to the south-west, and great numbers of the people from Corca Baiscin crossed the Shannon in their currachs, and were baptized in the waters of the river. In compliance with their request St. Patrick ascended a hill near Foynes, since known as Cnoc Patrick, and blessed the land of Thomond.

St. Patrick is said to have founded the See of Armagh in the year 453. Dairé, a chieftain of Ulster, gave him the site for the church, and it was to Armagh that, when the Saint felt his end approaching, he went to die. He set out from Saul towards Armagh, and tradition has it that he was commanded by an angel to return to Saul. He died and was buried at Downpatrick about the year 493.

Judged by what he accomplished, St. Patrick must be ranked amongst the greatest of the missionaries who spread the Christian Faith beyond the limits of the Roman Empire. He organised the Christianity which existed in Ireland before the date of his arrival, converted kingdoms which were still pagan, and made Ireland a part of universal Christendom. He had a strong personality, great powers of initiative, a splendid enthusiasm for his great mission, and he showed himself wise and politic by the manner in which he dealt with the kings and chieftains, effecting a great revolution in the life and habits of the

people with little bitterness and no sacrifice of human life. While he did not introduce Christianity into Ireland, he secured the permanence of the faith in the country, and made it a living force which could never be extinguished. Like the great Apostle of the Gentiles he refused to take any personal credit for the success of his efforts, and attributed the results he had attained to the purpose of the Creator, and the working of Divine Grace. "I protest in truth," he writes, "and can rejoice in the thought before God and His holy angels, that I never had any motive save the Gospel and its promises, for ever returning to that people from among whom I had escaped. And I beg all that believe in God and seek and fear Him, whoever of them may be pleased to examine or read this letter, which I, Patrick—poor sinful and ignorant creature as I am—have written in Ireland, that no one will ever say that my ignorance is to have the credit of it, if I have effected or performed any little matter according to the purpose of God ; but believe and be assured for certain that it was God Who has done it. And this is my confession before I die."







Frontispiece of Epistle of St. Jerome.  
Book of Durrow.  
Illuminated by St. Columcille.

## CHAPTER III.

### St. Columcille

In the whole range of Irish biography there is not a nobler or more attractive figure than that of St. Columcille. Dowered with many gifts, he has gained fame as a poet, statesman, scholar, patriot and missionary. We are fortunate in possessing the record of his life which was written by one of his own monks, St. Adamnan; a work which has been described as one of the most complete pieces of such biography that all Europe can boast of, not only at so early a period but throughout the whole of the Middle Ages—one of the most living, most attractive and most authentic monuments of Christian history. In the vivid portrait which Adamnan has drawn of the first Abbot of Iona, we can still feel the singular beauty and charm of the great Irish Saint who takes rank amongst the most splendid types of Christianity. "Angelic in appearance, graceful in speech, holy in work, with talents of the highest order and consummate prudence, he lived during thirty-four years an island-soldier. He could not spend the space of even one hour without study or prayer, writing or some other holy occupation. So incessantly was



he engaged night and day in the unwearied exercise of fasting and watching, that the burden of each of these austerities would seem beyond the power of all human endurance. And still in all these, he was beloved by all; for the holy joy ever beaming from his face revealed the joy and gladness with which the Holy Spirit filled his inmost soul."

St. Columcille was born at Gartan, Co. Donegal, on December 7th, 521. His father Phelim, a chieftain of the O'Donnell Clan, was the great grandson of King Niall of the Nine Hostages, and his mother Eithne was a descendant of the Kings of Leinster, so that by both parents he was of royal lineage. After his birth, in accordance with the custom of the times, he was placed in fosterage with an aged priest Cruitnechan, and under his care the boy's mind became imbued with a deep religious feeling. According to the 'Leabhar Breac' he derived his name Columcille or 'Dove of the Church' from his gentle affectionate manners, and because he was so often met by his companions coming forth from prayer in the Church of Tullydoughlas near his birthplace. When he passed from under the care of Cruitnechan, St. Columcille became a pupil of the Ecclesiastical School founded by St. Finnian at Moville, Co. Down, where he was ordained deacon. He then studied for a time under Gemman, an aged bard of Leinster, and acquired from him the love of poetry which was one of his most distinguishing and beautiful characteristics. From Gemman, he



went to the famous monastic school founded by St. Finnian at Clonard, near the Boyne. Here he had as his companions the eleven great Saints who with himself were afterwards known as the 'Twelve Apostles of Erin.' Columcille was ordained priest, while at Clonard, by Bishop Etchen of Clonfad, and after his ordination he went with three of his companions Comgall Kiaran and Kairrech to complete his sacred studies in the school of St. Mobhi at Glasnevin.

When St. Columcille went forth on his missionary work he founded his first church on a high ridge over Lough Foyle, which was covered with a great oak from which it was called 'Daire' or the 'Oak Wood,' and which was known for nearly a thousand years afterwards as Daire Columcille. The church was situated on the site of the present city of Londonderry. At the date when he founded the church 545, the Saint was twenty-four years of age, and during the seven years which followed he went through Ireland establishing many churches and monastic societies, of which the most famous were Durrow, Arran, Boyle, Swords, Raphoe, Kells, Tory Island and Drumcliff. His greatest work, however, was to be done outside of Ireland amongst the Picts of Scotland, who lived north of the Grampian Mountains. Tradition has it that the event which led to his exile was the great battle of Culdreimhne which was fought six miles north of Sligo between Diarmait King of Ireland, and Columcille's kinsmen, the Clan Niall. The Clan Niall felt aggrieved because Diarmait

had slain one of their clansmen, the young Prince Curnan, who had taken sanctuary with him at Tara, and on account of a decision pronounced by Diarmait on the question of the ownership of a book. St. Columcille had made a copy of a beautiful book of the Psalms that was kept by St. Finnian at Clonard. When St. Finnian discovered this he demanded the copy as his right. The book had cost Columcille much pain and trouble, and he refused to surrender it. The disputants referred the matter to King Diarmait, and he decided in favour of St. Finnian on the principle that "to every cow belongeth her calf." Columcille protested against Diarmait's judgment, and went back to his kinsmen who took up arms in his cause. King Diarmait was utterly defeated at the battle of Culdreimhne. After the battle Laisren, Columcille's confessor, told him that as penance for the deaths of the many warriors who were slain in the battle he must leave Ireland, and win as many souls for Christ as there had been lives lost.

This is the traditional account of the cause of Columcille's exile, but it is to be noted that the Old Irish Life does not ascribe his journey to Scotland to the circumstances arising out of the quarrel with King Diarmait, but merely states that:—  
 "When Columcille had made the circuit of all Erin, and when he had sown faith and religion; when numerous multitudes had been baptised by him; when he had founded churches and establishments, and had left in them seniors, and reliquaries, and relics of martyrs, the determination

that he had formed from the beginning of his life came into his mind—namely, to go on pilgrimage. He then meditated going across the sea to preach the word of God to the men of Alba and to the Britons and the Saxons. He went therefore on a voyage. His age was forty-two when he went. He was thirty-four years in Alba. And the number that went with him was, twenty bishops, forty priests, thirty deacons, and fifty students. He went in good spirits until he reached the place the name of which to-day is Hii-Coluim-Cille (Iona).” It is also to be noted that neither Bede nor Adamnan make any reference to the quarrel between the Saints, so that the popular version of the cause of St. Columcille’s exile is a story of a very doubtful character.

St. Columcille and his companions landed at Iona in 563 at the little bay of Port-na-Churraich, the ‘ Bay of the Coracle,’ on the southern shore of the island. Above the bay on a hill is the cairn, that has been known since his time as the ‘ Carn-cul-ri-Erin,’ ‘ The Cairn of the Back turned to Ireland,’ which marks the spot where the exile found that Ireland was no longer in sight, and where he could work and pray without being tempted to return to his own dearly-loved country. The story of his voyage tells that he landed first at Oronsay, but when he found that Ireland was visible from one of the hills on the island, he went onward to Iona for he could not endure to live away from Erin, and yet within sight of his Fatherland. He established his church on the eastern slope of the

island, and here trained his followers and disciples to become the Soldiers of Christ. His monks were taught by him to observe Obedience, Celibacy, Caution and Reason in Speech, Humility, Hospitality, and Kindness to Animals. The two years after his landing were spent in establishing his community, and in preparation for his mission to the neighbouring islands and the mainland of Scotland. He set out in the year 565 on a long journey through 'The Great Glen of Alba,' the series of lakes and glens that are now united by the Caledonian Canal, in order to preach the gospel to the Northern Picts.

"It was a daring adventure," writes Mr. Morison in his *Life of Columba*, "full of hazard, thus to pierce into the heart of Pictland. It called for undaunted courage and resource, and unwavering trust in the leader. Yet how few of the travellers who pass through that glen to-day with its deep lochs and its dark and solemn forests, and all its mystery of light and shadow, know anything of the little band of heroes who threaded it many centuries ago?" Brude, King of the Picts, barred his gates against the mission, and his Druids and their followers opposed it in every way. Columcille and his followers triumphed over all natural and human obstacles, and the handful of undaunted men bore the standard of the Cross into the country where the legions of Cæsar had failed to subdue the inhabitants. The devoted little company of Irishmen worked incessantly and indefatigably for many years amongst the Picts of



the mainland, and throughout the islands on the west coast. They founded their churches and schools everywhere, and instructed the people in the faith, baptising and preaching. The gospel was brought to the Orkneys, Shetlands, the Hebrides and the Faroes. Even within the lifetime of its founder Iona sent forth missionaries to Northumbria, the Isle of Man, and South Britain.

St. Columcille returned to Ireland in the year 575 to attend the great Convention of Drumceatt, near Limavady. He was attended, as an old poem tells us, by forty priests, twenty bishops of noble worth, thirty deacons and fifty youths. He had two important objects in being present at the Convention. He desired to secure that Dalriada, an Irish colony in Scotland, should be freed from an annual tribute, which was paid to the Mother Country, and also that the bards of Ireland, who were under sentence of banishment on account of their burdensomeness, should not be sent from the country. In both objects, owing to his great personal influence and power over men, he was successful. The colony of Dalriada was freed from all tribute to the supreme King of Ireland, on condition that its inhabitants should join in expeditions or 'hostings' organised in Ireland, and that the Mother Country and her colony should mutually assist one another against the Saxons, Danes or Norsemen. The sentence of banishment on the bards was revoked on condition that they should lessen their claims to refection and maintenance at the hands of the people, and that they

should curtail the retinues of their followers. Dallan Forgaill, the chief of the bards, expressed the thanks of the brotherhood to Columcille by composing a poem in his honour 'Amhra Columcille'—'The Praises of Columcille.' Dallan tells us in the poem that the twelve hundred poets who were at the Convention composed a song of praise for their preserver, and that they sang it with music and chorus, 'and a surpassing music it was.' But Columcille forbade his praise to be further produced or published, adding that no one should be praised in a life that might end badly, and that he alone who had run well and ended his race successfully should be praised after death.

Adamnan, Columcille's biographer, gives many particulars of the life of the great Abbot and Saint of Iona. He would often bathe the feet of the brethren after their daily labour, and used to carry the bags of flour from the mill to the kitchen. He practised great austerities, sleeping on a hide spread on the ground, with a stone for pillow, and was most strict and constant in fasting, prayer, and meditation. Much of his time was spent in writing, and the transcription of the Scriptures and the Psalter. In the Old Irish Life of the Saint it is stated that he transcribed 'three hundred splendid, lasting books.' He was himself, too, a gifted poet, and in all probability a member of the Order of the Bards. We have three beautiful Latin hymns attributed to him, the 'Altus Prosator,' 'In te Christe' and 'Noli Pater,' and he composed many poems in his own native Irish

tongue, of which some still survive. His reputation for sanctity spread far abroad, and in the words of Adamnan: "Though he lived in this small and remote island of the British Sea, his name not only became illustrious throughout the whole of our own Ireland and Britain, but reached even to triangular Spain and Gaul and Italy, and also to the city of Rome itself, the head of all cities." Men who came into contact with him were charmed alike with his wisdom and his humility. "There was not born of the Gaedhil," says the old biographer, "a being more illustrious, more wise, or of better family than Columcille. There came not of them any person who was more modest, more humble, or more lowly."

The story of his death as told by Adamnan is one of the most affecting passages in Christian biography. On the last day of his life he went to a little hill near the monastery that overlooked the whole island, and gazing around him for the last time, he blessed the island and its inhabitants. Then he told Dermot, one of his monks who was with him, of his approaching death. "This day," he said, "is in the sacred volume called the 'Sabbath,' which is interpreted, 'Rest,' and to-day is truly a Sabbath for me, because it is the last day with me of this present toilsome life, upon which after all my toils and sorrows, I come to enjoy my Sabbath; and at the approaching hour of midnight, as the hallowed day of the Lord begins, I shall, as the Scripture saith, be going the way of my fathers. For now my Lord Jesus

vouchsafes to invite me to Himself, and when this midnight, as I say, comes, I shall go at His own bidding to be with Him."

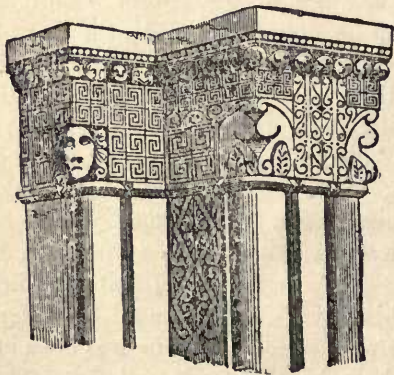
As he was returning to the monastery he sat down by the roadside, wearied by age and his exertions. Whilst he sat here an old white horse that was used for carrying the milk pails to the monastery, laid his head on the Saint's breast and began to whinny and to drop great tears. When the attendant saw this, he came up to drive the horse away, but the Saint forbade him, saying, "Let him alone, for he loves me. Whilst thou, a man possessing a rational soul, couldst in no wise know anything about my departure hence, this brute beast, devoid of reason, has been shown in some way by the Creator Himself that his master is about to depart from him." And saying this, he blessed his servant, the horse, as it sadly turned to go away. Then returning to the monastery, he sat in his cell transcribing the Psalter until he came to the verse of the thirty-third Psalm which reads:—"But they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing." "Here," he said, laying down his pen, "I must stop, and what follows let Baithene (his cousin and disciple) write." After attending vespers in the church he returned to his cell, and sat up during the night on his pallet, a bare rock, exhorting the Brothers to preserve mutual and unfeigned charity and peace amongst themselves. When the bell began to toll for prayer at midnight he went to the church, which he reached before any of the other monks, followed



by his attendant Dermot, and fell on his bended knees before the altar in prayer. Dermot was unable to see St. Columcille in the dark church, and called out, "Where art thou, Father?" Then groping his way in the darkness he found the Saint lying before the altar, and raising him up a little he placed the holy head on his bosom. The little community of monks now began to assemble with lights in the church, and all wept when they beheld their dying father. The Saint opened his eyes and looked around him with great cheerfulness and joy of countenance. Dermot lifted up his right hand that he might bless the choir of monks, but the venerable father himself at the same time moved his hand as much as he was able, so that though he could not speak, he might give his last blessing to the Brotherhood. And thus signifying his holy benediction, the Saint breathed forth his spirit. The author of the Old Life says that in three places is the full habitation of St. Columcille, Iona, Derry, and Down. To Iona he gave his 'stainless grace,' to Derry, his soul,' and to Down, where he was buried, his body.

The great name of St. Columcille is held dear by the descendants of the Scots both in Erin and in Alba. The people of the Hebrides invoke his aid to this day in their annual Shealing Hymn, and the stone flag on which he was born at Gartan is worn bare by the hands and feet of pious pilgrims. Yet he has his full habitation throughout even a wider area, and even in his own time Adamnan could write that:—"Though he lived

in this small and remote island of the British sea, his name has not only become illustrious throughout the whole of our own Ireland and Britain, but has reached even to triangular Spain, and to Gaul, and to Italy which lies beyond the Pennine Alps, and also to the city of Rome itself, the head of all cities." "His large statesmanship," writes Mrs. Greene, "his lofty genius, the passionate and poetic temperament that filled men with awe and reverence, the splendid voice and stately figure that seemed almost miraculous gifts, the power of inspiring love that brought dying men to see his face once more before they fell at his feet in death, give surpassing dignity and beauty to his life."



Capitals and Mouldings, Clonmacnois.





Shrine of St. Cullanus' Bell.  
Art work of eleventh century.



## CHAPTER IV.

### St. Columbanus

The great St. Columbanus is the most striking figure of his age, and one of the most remarkable men in the long catalogue of the Saints. He has been described as being in many respects the greatest, bravest, the most thoroughly national, and the most representative of all the warriors of the cross that went forth from Ireland. There is no character lay or religious in our history who represents so well in temperament the ‘*perfervidum ingenium Scotorum*’—the lightning genius of the Gael. “A stern ascetic aflame with religious passion, a finished scholar bringing from Ireland a knowledge of Latin, Greek, Hebrew, of rhetoric, geometry and poetry, and a fine taste, Columbanus battled for twenty years with the vice and ignorance of half-pagan Burgundy. Scornful of ease, indifferent to danger, astonished with the apathy of Italy as compared with the zeal of Ireland, he argued and denounced with ‘the freedom of speech which accords with the custom of my country.’”<sup>\*</sup> Owing to his splendid character and achievement he is entitled to be considered as

<sup>\*</sup>Mrs. A. S. Greene, “Irish Nationality,” p. 49.

the outstanding personality in the history of Europe of his own time, and it is not too much to say that a more remarkable man never went forth to preach the Gospel of Christ. In his fiery zeal for the faith, and his strong detestation of the vice and brutality of the people amidst whom he laboured, he recalls to mind the stern prophets of the Old Testament. The danger in which he stood from his fiery denunciation of the vicious lives of kings and nobles and the apathy of French churchmen never deterred him from his task.' A great French historian tells us that he preached the reformation of morals and devotion to the faith with perfect heedlessness of all other considerations and all external circumstances, sometimes embroiling himself with princes and bishops, throwing the divine fire on all sides, and unconcerned as to the conflagration which he caused.

St. Columbanus was born about the year 543 in West Leinster. He was educated under the care of St. Sinell at a monastic school at Cleenish in Lough Erne, and afterwards studied at the great school of Bangor under St. Comgall. When he became fully trained for his career as a missionary, Columbanus set forth from Ireland to the Continent, bringing twelve monks of Bangor as his companions. Saint Atalas, who succeeded him at Bobbio, St. Gall, who founded the monastery of St. Gall on the shore of Lake Constance, Lua, founder of a monastery in Neustria, Waldolen, head of the monastery of Luxeuil, were included in the small company. After staying for a time

in Britain to visit certain of the monasteries which had already been founded by Irishmen there, Columbanus and his companions went to Gaul.

The date of the arrival of St. Columbanus in Gaul is fixed by most writers as 575, and he found there a state of affairs which might have daunted a missionary less courageous and resolute than himself. The country had reached a comparatively high degree of civilisation as a colony of the Roman Empire in the first centuries of the Christian era, but this civilisation was utterly destroyed when the Vandals, Huns, and Franks became the masters of the West of Europe. In the words of a celebrated historian, "the scene of peace and plenty was suddenly changed into a desert, and the prospect of smoking ruins could alone distinguish the solitude of nature from the work of man." The Franks, after a time, embraced Christianity, but, though nominally Christians, they still retained the worst vices of barbarity and paganism. Even after their conversion they remained as vicious and as brutal as before, and the people over whom they ruled were reduced to ignorance and savagery. The native bishops and priests were altogether unable to make head against the vices of the northern invaders, and religion and learning came to be almost entirely neglected.

Such was the state of Gaul, when Columbanus and his few companions went through it preaching and teaching. His fiery and enthusiastic nature made his words to the people eloquent and

impressive, and everywhere he went he made sincere and earnest converts. His splendid courage and intense zeal for the salvation of souls made an irresistible appeal to the hearts of the people, and witnessed to the strength of the faith which impelled him to take great risks and endure great sacrifices. Passing through Gaul, he came to the court of Gontran, King of Burgundy. Gontran received Columbanus and his fellow missionaries kindly, and established them at Annegrai, where they founded their first monastery, which was to be the parent of many religious houses on the Continent. Columbanus drew up for the guidance of his monks a series of rules which were stricter and more severe than those regulating the life of any monastic community in Europe, with the exception of the monasteries of Ireland, from which he derived the customs and practices that were to be observed by his followers. He realised that if he was to be successful in combatting the sin and ignorance of a country which was pagan at heart, he must use the sternest discipline amongst the men who were to serve as his instruments. His monks had to employ every moment of the day, and the intervals between the united prayer of the community were devoted to copying manuscripts, writing, teaching in schools or labour in the fields. They were only to cease from work when overpowered by sleep, and had to commence their tasks again after insufficient rest. In commenting on the sternness of this rule established by Columbanus, Montalembert rightly



observes that it was only at the price of excessive and perpetual labour that France and Europe were restored to cultivation and life.

We should, however, entirely misread the character and mission of Columbanus if we only view him as a stern and rigid ascetic, who was utterly careless of his own ease and that of others, and who disregarded all things human in the fiery zeal of his great life work. He was, it is true, strong and inflexible in all things that pertained to the faith, yet he always retained a warm and kindly Irish heart, and had a great sympathy for all created things. Legends tell us that he had a fascination for animals, that the birds played freely with him as he walked through the forest, and that the squirrels came down from the trees and nestled in his cowl. It is said that on one occasion, when he was in the depth of the woods, a pack of wolves gathered round him, and were subdued by the mildness and saintliness of his presence.

Though he ruled his disciples sternly, he loved and was beloved by every member of his household. On one occasion when he was bidding them farewell, he concluded his letter with the following words:—"The end of my parchment compels me to finish my letter. Love is not orderly, and it is this that has made it confused. Farewell, dear hearts of mine. Pray for me that I may live in God." He always wrote to them affectionately as his dearest sons, his dearest pupils, his brethren in abstinence. When parting from Deicola, who

was also from Leinster, and who was one of his oldest friends, he said : “ May the Almighty Lord, for the love of Whom you have left your native land, grant that we may meet before His face in heaven.” He loved tenderly St. Valery, a shepherd boy, who became one of his monks, and who had charge of the novices’ garden, and always held it as a mark of the divine favour, that no flowers smelt so sweet, and no vegetables were so fresh as those of his dear brother Valery.

The community soon became too large for the old castle of Annegrai and it became necessary to establish another house at Luxeuil, about seven miles distant. At the time of the Roman occupation, Luxeuil, or Luxovium, had been an important town and it was famous for its medicinal springs and baths. During the invasions of the barbarians the Roman town was reduced to ashes, and the population and all the semblances of agriculture and cultivation had disappeared from the district. When Columbanus came there the place was deserted save by wild animals and the ruins of the Roman villas were overgrown by thickets and weeds. In a few years the monks had cleared away woods, tilled and sowed the land, and transformed the wilderness into a smiling garden. They toiled so hard that they often fell asleep when returning home from their daily task. Frankish youths of noble family spurred by the example of the Irish monks, joined the brotherhood, and shared their hard life of toil and prayer. One of them, Theodulf, followed the plough for twenty-two

years, and when he died the people kept his plough in the village church as a relic.

When Columbanus had lived for some years at Luxeuil, a dispute arose between himself and the secular clergy. The French bishops and priests in the neighbourhood complained that the Columban monks wore the tonsure differently from the Gaulish clergy. The Columban monks, in accordance with the Irish custom, shaved the front of the head as far as the ears, while the priests of Gaul shaved the top of the head. It was also complained that Columbanus and his followers calculated the time of Easter in accordance with the practice introduced into Ireland by St. Patrick, and did not conform to the usage of the French church in this matter. St. Columbanus was summoned to attend before an assembly of Gaulish bishops to answer on these points, but he did not appear lest, as he tells us, "he might contend in words." He wrote instead a letter to the French churchmen, in which he admonished them to hold Synods more frequently, and to pay attention to matters more important than the celebration of Easter. As to his Paschal Cycle and himself, he said: "I am not the author of this divergence. I came as a poor stranger into these parts, for the cause of Christ, Our Saviour. One thing alone I ask of you, Holy Fathers, permit me to live in solitude in these forests near the bones of seventeen of my brothers now dead. . . . Surely it is better for you to comfort than to disturb us, poor old men, strangers, too, in your midst. Let

us rather love one another in the charity of Christ, striving to fulfil his precepts, and thereby to secure a place in the assembly of the just made perfect in heaven."

Another source of trouble also arose. Thierry, the youthful King of Austrasia, acting on the advice of his grandmother Brunehaut, repudiated his lawful wife, and lived in a state of debauchery. Saint Columbanus reproved Thierry for his wicked life, and the King, who greatly revered him, promised to reform, but showed no signs of amendment. One day Brunehaut brought four illegitimate sons of Thierry before Columbanus, and asked him to bless them. Columbanus replied: "No, I will not bless them; they shall not reign, they are a bad breed." Finally Columbanus refused the guilty pair admission to the monastery, and the angry King made an order that it should be open to all visitors under pain of forfeiting the royal gifts and patronage. St. Columbanus replied:—"If you wish us to violate our rules, we do not want any of your gifts." The Saint and his Irish companions were thereupon expelled from the kingdom.

In parting from the community at Luxeuil Columbanus sent a letter of farewell, in which, writes Montalembert, recollections of classical antiquity mingle with evangelical instruction to dictate to the Saint some of the finest and proudest words which Christian genius has ever produced. The letter runs as follows:—"I had at first meant to write a letter full of sorrows and tears, but



knowing well that your heart is overwhelmed with cares and labours, I have changed my style, and sought to dry the tears rather than call them forth. I have permitted only gentleness to be seen outside, and chained down the grief in the depths of my soul. But my own tears begin to flow! I must drive them back; for it does not become a good soldier to weep in front of the battle. After all, this that has happened to us is nothing new. Is it not what we have preached every day? Was there not of old a philosopher wiser than the others who was thrown into prison for maintaining against the opinion of all that there was only one God? The Gospels also are full of all that is necessary to encourage us. They were written with that purpose, to teach the true disciples of Christ crucified to follow Him bearing their cross. Our perils are many; the struggle that threatens us is severe, but the recompense is glorious, and the freedom of our choice is manifest. Without adversaries no conflict, and without conflict, no crown. Where the struggle is, there is courage, vigilance, patience, fidelity, wisdom, prudence; out of the fight there is misery and disaster. Thus then, without war no crown, and I add without freedom no honour."

On leaving Luxeuil St. Columbanus went northward and was hospitably received by Clotaire, King of Neustria, at Soissons. Thence he went to Metz, the capital of Austrasia, where he was joined by some of his brethren, who had escaped from Luxeuil in order to accompany him, and with

their help, he began a mission amongst the pagan populations who dwelt on the right bank of the Rhine. He established monasteries at Tuggen on Lake Zurich and at Constance. After spending three years in Switzerland, he crossed the Alps by the Pass of St. Gothard into Italy, and Agilulph, King of the Lombards, gave him lands for the foundation of a monastery at Bobbio, a lonely spot in the Appenines. There was a ruined church at Bobbio dedicated to St. Peter, and St. Columbanus, who was now over seventy years of age, set about to repair it, to build his monastery, and to clear away the surrounding district of timber in order to prepare it for cultivation. When the monastery was built St. Columbanus went to Rome to obtain the Pope's approval for his rule, and placed the monastery under his protection. He lived but one year after the foundation of Bobbio, and passed away from the brotherhood in the year 615, when he was in his seventy-third year.

The life work of Columbanus must be judged, not by his own accomplishment alone, but by the accomplishment of the men who were trained by him, and under the rule which he established. It has been calculated that 105 monasteries were founded by his disciples in France, Germany, Switzerland, and Italy. The great monastery of Bobbio which he founded in Lombardy became one of the most celebrated homes of religion and learning in Europe. "St. Columbanus," said Montalembert, "lit up at Bobbio a fire of science and teaching which for ages was a centre of peace

for Northern Italy." Frederick Ozanam writes: "The apostolic zeal which drove the monks of Ireland to the Continent, led St. Columbanus to Bobbio, at the foot of the wild deserts of the Appenines. He bore to this place, along with the severe observances of the hermits of his country, their passion for letters, and the necessity which possessed them for learning and teaching. The spirit of this great reformer lived after him and spread on from those Irishmen who were his companions to their Italian disciples and successors."

There are many sides to the character of this great Irish Saint, but in whatever light we view him he stands out nobly in relief, worthy to take rank with the highest types that Christianity has produced. Perhaps the outstanding feature of his character is his dauntless courage, and history, as Montalembert says well, should admire in him monastic integrity struggling against Merovingian vice and brutality; the fiery and solitary missionary taking up, in the face of the conquerors of Gaul, the freedom of the prophets of the ancient law against the crowned profligate. The task which he accomplished in France is sufficient to establish his fame amongst the great Saints of the Church, but his activities did not cease after he left that country. When more than seventy years of age he founded the celebrated monastery of Bobbio in Italy, and at the time of his death he is said to have contemplated a mission to the Slav nations. A French History of Literature sums up thus his life work: "The light of St. Columbanus,

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disseminated by his knowledge and doctrine, wherever he presented himself, caused a contemporary writer to compare him to the sun in his course from East to West; and he continued after his death to shine forth in numerous disciples whom he had trained in learning and piety."



Initial letter "S" Book of Hymns.



## CHAPTER V.

### The Irish Saints

During the three centuries that followed the coming of St. Patrick there were numerous Saints in every province of Ireland, and the conversion of the people to the faith influenced the whole life of the nation to an extent that has scarcely been paralleled in the history of the spread of Christianity. Cardinal Newman speaks of "the Irish multitude of Saints which the Book of Life alone is large enough to contain," and Montalembert tells us that the Thebaid reappeared in Ireland, and that the West had no longer anything to envy in the history of the East.

An ancient Irish manuscript of unknown authorship divides the Saints of Ireland into three great orders. The First Order was in the time of St. Patrick. They were 350 in number, all bishops and all founders of churches, and were either citizens of the Roman Empire, Franks, Britons or Scots. This order consisted chiefly of St. Patrick with the great number of foreign missionaries who accompanied him to Ireland, or who came there after his time, and of the Britons and native Irish ordained by the Apostle of Ire-

land and his successors. The Order continued for more than a century after the date of St. Patrick's arrival. The Second Order numbered 300, of whom many were priests and a few were bishops. It included Finnian, Enda, Colman, Comgall, Ciaran, Columba, Brandan, Cainnech, Coemghan, Lasrian, Lugeus and Barrind, and flourished during the latter half of the sixth century. The Third Order of Saints lived in Ireland for a period which extended for about seventy years from the end of the sixth century. The writer of the manuscript says that "the First Order was most holy, the Second Order holier, and the Third holy. The First glowed like the sun in the fervour of their charity; the Second cast a pale radiance like the moon; the Third shone like the aurora. These Three Orders the blessed Patrick foreknew, enlightened by heavenly wisdom, when in prophetic vision he saw at first all Ireland ablaze, and afterwards only the mountains on fire; and at last saw lamps lit in the valleys."

The First Order of Saints were mainly occupied in spreading the Christian faith amongst the Irish people. They were not connected, as a rule, with monasteries, although there were monastic establishments and schools founded during the period, and many of the abbots were bishops. Their lives were, in general, as Dr. Healy remarks, too full of missionary labours to be given to the government or foundation of monasteries. They devoted all their energy to the task of converting the Irish people from paganism, and they effected this great

change by their zeal and fervour, leaving no bitter memories and without any sacrifice of human life. When they had satisfactorily accomplished their work a transition set in from the missionary church of St. Patrick and his immediate successors, who were engaged in preaching the Christian Faith and founding churches, to the monastic church of the sixth century. The Saints of the Second Order were the pioneers of the great monastic movement in Ireland, and the love of monastic seclusion characterised to a remarkable degree the religious life of the country during the period. The movement took its rise principally from the great monastery and school founded by St. Finnian at Clonard, as the Saints who were educated there went forth to found, in imitation of their master, monasteries and schools in the different provinces. The Third Order was chiefly composed of Anchorites or hermits, who retired from the world to spend their lives in prayer and meditation in places removed from human society. The desire for solitude had become general amongst religious men of the time, and we find whole communities living apart in remote valleys or on lonely islands. Each member of the community constructed a little cell for himself, a church was built in the centre of the cells and a low rath or wall surrounded the settlement. The monks passed the greater portion of their time apart from one another in their own cells, and only assembled together in the church for common worship or at meal times. There are interesting remains of

these hermit communities on some of the islands off the Irish coast, notably at Inishmurray off the coast of Sligo, at Ardoilen off the coast of Galway, and on the Great Skellig off the coast of Kerry, where there is still a group of the beehive-shaped stone houses built by the monks in a good state of preservation.

The ecclesiastical system prevailing in Ireland for a long period was almost exclusively monastic. The monasteries were governed by rules that had in many cases been handed down from their founders. Thus reference is made in ancient documents to the rules of St. Ailbe of Emly, St. Ciaran of Clonmacnoise, St. Comghall of Bangor and St. Carthach of Lismore. These rules were not similar to the set body of rules which were afterwards drawn up for the regulations of great religious orders like the Benedictines and the Dominicans, but were a number of pious practices derived from the precept or example of the first Abbot. In all of these rules the three virtues most strongly commanded are obedience, poverty, and chastity. Every member of the community had to yield the most implicit obedience to the commands of the Abbot. To hold riches in contempt and to denude oneself of all worldly possessions was regarded as the first perfection of a monk. The rule of St. Columcille prescribes absolute nakedness from worldly goods in imitation of Christ. The life of the community was conceived as a warfare; they regarded themselves as the soldiers of Christ, and therefore divorced themselves from earthly in-



terests. They were also required to be chaste in thought, word, and work. The rule of St. Columbanus provides that silence, "which is the practice of justice," must be carefully preserved at every task and in every place. The tongue was regarded as a source of sin, and therefore the monks must only speak when absolutely necessary, and the Abbot in giving his orders was to be brief and to the point. Humility was another virtue strongly insisted upon and the rule of St. Carthach of Lismore requires the monk to live in humility towards all, showing to everyone "devotion, humility, and enslavement."

The spirit of monasticism existed in the Irish Church from the beginning. St. Patrick writes of the great multitude of the Scots and their daughters who became monks and virgins of Christ. The first ardours of the faith, which brought the first Christians in other countries to martyrdom, drew the Irish neophytes to the monastery, says Frederick Ozanam. The bishops and clergy left by St. Patrick in the churches which he founded, lived together in a relation similar to the community life in a monastery. The clan system also assimilated to the monastic life where the Abbot was the spiritual father of the other monks as the chief was considered the father of the clan, and the example of the members of the chieftain's families who became Christians and monks was imitated by their followers. A Leinster chieftain, who was baptized by St. Moedoc of Ferns said, "I offer myself to God and

to you, and with myself I offer all my race ; be you master over all of us." Women were not behind-hand in sanctity and St. Brigid, St. Ita, and St. Fanchea founded communities of holy women.

The more ardent and enthusiastic spirits were desirous of leading a life of even greater mortification and prayer than was contemplated by the monastic rule, and went to live apart in solitary communion with God. One of the earliest of these, St. Enda, was a son of the King of Oriel, who resigned his kingdom and became a monk, obtaining from his relative the King of Munster a grant of Aran Mor island as a place where he might retreat from the world for solitude, penance, and mortification. St. Kevin dwelt alone for seven years in a small cave at Glendalough. St. Fiac retired every year for the season of Lent to a cave near Sletty, taking with him some barley loaves, which were the only food he used until he returned to his monastery to celebrate the great festival of Easter with his brethren. The Saints who led this life of prayer and mortification became naturally the objects of great veneration and respect, and when their places of retreat were discovered, others came to learn from them and to place themselves under their guidance. Thus disciples came from various parts of Ireland to St. Enda at Aran, and after a time he had one hundred and fifty monks under his control. In the same way a shepherd made known the retreat of St. Kevin, and great numbers of holy men made their way to Glendalough attracted by his reputation for sanctity, so that

Kevin became the father of many monks. St. Finian's lonely retreat at Clonard became a place of great resort of pilgrims who were drawn there by his learning and sanctity, and Clonard soon became the greatest ecclesiastical and teaching centre in Ireland.

As most of our Irish Saints were trained under the monastic system, it is interesting to take a survey of the life in the monasteries in Ireland. The rules drawn up by St. Columcille and St. Columbanus for the guidance of their monks are still extant, and they give us some idea of the training that produced such a great number of Saints. In the rule of St. Columcille the day is divided into three parts and the three labours of the day are prayer, work, and reading. The work of a monk was again divided into three parts, and was to consist of: Firstly, the necessary work of each member of the community and the work of his dwelling; secondly, his share of the brethren's work; lastly, his help was to be given to the people of the neighbourhood by instruction, writing, sewing, or whatever labour they might be in need of. St. Columbanus describes the work of a monastery as consisting of fasting, prayer, labour, and study. The life of the monks was one of great austerity and activity, and it was provided that at all times during the day when they were not occupied at prayer they should be engaged on some work for the community or for the people whom they served. They slept on the bare ground or on a skin laid on a little straw or

rushes. St. Columcille and St. Ciaran of Clonmacnoise had stones for their pillows. Their food was of the simplest and poorest character, and was only just sufficient to maintain them in their life of toil. All, including the Abbot, engaged in manual labour, levelling and fencing the ground, and cultivating the fields and reclaiming woods and wildernesses. Some of them were skilled workers in metal, or craftsmen, and made many articles for their own use or for the outside world. Others were physicians and helped the poor in the time of sickness. They had attached to the monastery a guest house for travellers, and here all who choose to avail of their hospitality were received and given the best cheer that the monastery could afford.

Writing was one of their chief occupations, and it is to their industry that we owe the preservation of most of our ancient learning that has come down to us. They copied and multiplied manuscripts for their own use, or for presentation to others, and executed their work of transcription with the greatest care and artistic beauty. St. Columcille gave up whatever time he could spare from other labours to this work, and he is said to have made three hundred copies of the New Testament with his own hand. They gave up another portion of their time to the study of the Sacred Scriptures, the Fathers of the Church, classical literature, and other branches of learning. They had also the duty of giving instruction in the schools.

A genuine and unselfish love of learning for its



own sake was one of the characteristic features in the lives of our Irish Saints. Many of them were endowed with great literary gifts and made important contributions to letters. A number of them gained distinction as poets. Saint Fiac of Sletty, one of the earliest of the converts of St. Patrick, who was a nephew of the royal poet Dubhtach, and who had been trained by his uncle for the Bardic profession, was the author of a metrical life of the National Apostle, which is one of the most important works that we possess in connection with the early history of the Church in Ireland. Saint Sechnall composed a hymn in honour of St. Patrick, and also a beautiful Eucharistic Hymn which is preserved in the Antiphonary of Bangor. Saint Columcille, who studied the art of poetry under the aged bard, Gemman of Leinster, has written poems in Irish and Latin. St. Columbanus sought refreshment from his labours as a missionary in the writing of playful Latin poems. Donatus, Bishop of Fiesol , has left us graceful Latin verses in praise of Ireland. Ultan, Cummain, and Colman were poets as well as Saints.

They had, also, a great love of nature, and, as Dr. Healy notes, a very keen perception of the grandeur and beauty of God's universe. "The voice of the storm and the strength of the sea, the majesty of lofty mountains and the glory of summer woods, spoke to their hearts even more eloquently than the voice of the preacher, or the writing on their parchments." They loved all the

beauties of the natural world about them which manifested the glory of the Creator of all things, and they learned to know the invisible things of God from the visible things that He had made. They chose positions of great natural beauty as the sites for their churches and monasteries. Sometimes individual saints chose remote or inaccessible places where they could live in uninterrupted communion with God and Nature, and built their oratories on uninhabited islands off the coast, or in lakes. St. Domangart had his cell on the summit of Slieve Donard, and St. Brandon lived for a time on the summit of Mount Brandon. St. Finan had his hermitage on an island in Lough Lee in Kerry, and St. Finbarr's first foundation was at lone Gongane Barra. St. Finan founded a monastery on the Skelligs, and Aran Mor was known as 'Aran of the Saints.'

Akin to their love of nature was their love of birds and animals. St. Patrick was in this, as in so many other respects their exemplar. The Irish life of the Saint tells that as he was going with Daire to mark out the site of his church at Armagh, they came upon a doe and her fawn lying beneath a tree. The startled doe fled away, and the king's attendants were about to kill the fawn, but St. Patrick interfered and saved it. Taking it gently upon his shoulders he bore it away, and the little animal's mother followed the Saint to a place of refuge. Tradition tells us that the squirrels and doves nestled in the hands of St. Columbanus and that the birds used to come to St.

Kevin and alight on his shoulders to sing him their sweetest songs. St. Columcille had a pet crane, which followed him on his walks about the monastery, and another story tells of how a wounded bird from Ireland was carried by the tempest to Iona; and of how the Saint cared and tended it, and set it free to return homewards when the storm had abated. St. Brendan had a pet crow, and St. Colman had a tame flock of ducks that came and went at his call. There is a beautiful legend that St. Ciaran of Saighir formed his first community of animals. On the margin of an ancient manuscript from the monastery of St. Gall there were found verses which an Irish monk composed in praise of the song of a blackbird which had interrupted him in his task of glossing.

The love of little children is noted as a characteristic of others of the Irish Saints. The Feilire of Angus refers to St. Ultan, Bishop of Ardraccan, as "the great sinless prince, in whom the little ones are flourishing: the children play greatly round Ultan of Ardraccan." It is also recorded that during the Yellow Plague he brought to his monastery a number of children whose fathers and mothers had been carried off by the disease, and fed and kept them. It is told of St. Fridolin that he was especially fond of boys and joined in their games and amusements.

An abundant literature of beautiful legends has grown up round the lives of our Irish Saints. In many cases the narrative of their deeds was

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written two or three centuries after their own age, and one can easily detect anachronisms and exaggerations. They were often founded on vague popular tradition which in course of time becomes naturally amplified and distorted, and were sometimes written to excite veneration and zeal, and with little regard for historical exactitude. Yet when due allowance has been made for all this, and when we entirely reject statements of a legendary or doubtful character, there is sufficient testimony of a thoroughly reliable nature to warrant the claim made by Dr. Healy that the first centuries of the faith in Ireland present a more beautiful spectacle before men and angels than anything seen in Christendom before or since. Père Gougaud who submits all his evidence to severe critical tests, and who will not accept stories that have any appearance of being legendary or imaginative, describes the period in the following words:—  
 “Such an efflorescence of sanctity, lasting for three or four centuries, is a spectacle that does honour to human nature regenerated by grace, and shows what Christianity is capable of accomplishing.”



Head of Celtic Pin.  
Clonmacnois.



## CHAPTER VI.

### The Irish Mission

We owe our knowledge of the labours and influence of the Irish monks in England and the Continent almost entirely to foreign sources, and, with a very few exceptions, our native annals are almost silent concerning the missionaries who went forth from Ireland in such great numbers. So frequently were they to be met with on the Continent that Walafried Strabo, a writer of the ninth century, remarks that the custom of travelling appeared to have become a part of the Irishman's nature.\* St. Gildas notes that to voyage over seas, and to journey over broad tracts of land was to the Irish monks not so much a weariness as a delight. "Most of them," he writes, "appear to have been born under a wandering planet." "The Celt," says Mr. Lane-Poole, "did not yield to the Norsemen in his passion for travel." Various reasons may be assigned to account for the large number of Irish monks that went abroad, and they certainly did not leave their native land because of any idle curiosity to see foreign

\**Consuetudo peregrinandi Jam paene in naturam Conversa est.* "Monumenta Germanica," II. 30.

countries or through a desire to wander about on the Continent. There was a multitude of monks in Ireland, and an urgent and great need for missionary effort in France and Germany. The Irish Saints had a real vocation for the apostolate, and many of them were impelled by the call to a higher degree of the ascetic life. They fully realised that charity began at home and they did not go away until the faith was secure in Ireland. An early canon attributed to the epoch of St. Patrick states:—One's first work must be to instruct the people of one's own country, following the example of Christ. It is only in the case when no results can flow from such instruction that one is permitted to abandon it following the example of the Apostle.\*

The Venerable Bede, a contemporary writer, has described for us how devoted and zealous the Irish missionaries were, and how they were always the servants of God and despised the things of the world. They possessed neither gold nor silver, and all that they received from the rich passed through their hands, into the hands of the poor. Kings and nobles visited them from time to time, only to pray in their churches, or to listen to their sermons, and as long as they remained in their cloisters they were content with the humble food of the brethren. Wherever one of these ecclesiastics or monks came, he was received by all with joy; and whenever he was seen journey-

\*Haddon and Stubbs: "Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents," II., p. 335.

ing across the country the people streamed around him to implore his benediction and hearken to his words. The priests entered the village only to preach or administer the sacraments; and so free were they from avarice, that it was only when compelled by the rich and noble that they accepted lands for the erection of monasteries. A modern French writer\* also notes the powerful influence which they were able to exercise in every country to which they went, and how men of all ranks were attracted to them. "They were wonderful," he writes, "as the revivers of the intellectual life and as drawers of souls. That strange mixture of fervour and austerity, of independence and respect for traditions, of simplicity and strong sensibility, of imagination held under sway and yet impetuous; all these traits, which constituted in their concert the religion of the ancient Celts, exercised an irresistible charm over a wide area. Noble strangers charmed by their ardent piety and their superior knowledge ran after these island masters, and would not afterwards leave them."

They excelled all nations in the ardour of their faith. "The Scots," says Jonas, "differ from all other nations in their laws, yet by their firm adherence to the dogmas of Christianity they excel all the neighbouring countries in their faith."† The Irish Church had been careful to preserve carefully the tradition of the faith that had been brought to her by St. Patrick from Rome, the

\*Gougaud: "Les Chrétientés Celtiques."

†Jonas: "Vita S. Columbani," cap. 6.

centre of Christendom, and she kept ever before her his maxim: "O Church of the Scots—nay of the Romans—as ye are Christians, be ye also Romans." St. Columbanus in a letter to Pope Boniface states "that although dwelling at the extremity of the world, all the Irish were disciples of Saints Peter and Paul, receiving no other than the evangelical and apostolic doctrine; that no heretic, or Jew, or schismatic, was to be found among them, but they still clung to the Catholic faith as it was first delivered to them by his (the Pope's) predecessors; that is the successors of the holy apostles; that the Irish race were attached to the Chair of St. Peter, and that although Rome was great and renowned, it was only on account of that Chair it was so with them. Through the two Apostles of Christ you are almost celestial, and Rome is the head of all churches, as well as of the world."

The Irish missionaries were wholly absorbed by the great mission which they had undertaken, and in the execution of it they took but little thought of their own welfare. They wandered about from place to place, sometimes through trackless solitudes, always trusting that God would provide for their support. King Clothaire the Second, while hunting the wild boar in the forest of Sequania, met one of them, St. Deicola, and asked him what were his means of livelihood, and how his brethren fared in such a wilderness as that. "It is written," said Deicola, "that they who fear God shall want for nothing. We are poor, it is true, but we love



and serve the Lord, and that is of more value than great riches." Special hostelries had to be founded for their support in many parts of the Frankish realm by the charity of their fellow-countrymen. In one of the capitularies of Charles the Bald drawn up after the Council of Meaux, in 845, there is mention made of the hostelries of the Scots, which holy men of that nation built and endowed with the gifts acquired by their sanctity.

It is to be remembered that the Irish monks had been trained in a hard and severe school, where it was the rule that the members of the community were to support themselves by the labour of their own hands. Mendicant orders whose members were dependent chiefly on the offerings of the faithful for subsistence did not exist in Ireland at this time, and were not introduced until many centuries later. The stronger brothers in the early monasteries devoted themselves mainly to manual labour, and all the brethren, including even the scribes and artists, were required to work in the fields. Thus everything that the little community needed was produced by themselves, and it became self-supporting. The companions of St. Columbanus by their incessant labour transformed one of the wildest and most deserted regions in France into fertile cornfields and vineyards. St. Fiacre and his fellow monks changed the portion of La Brieu, near Meux, from a wild forest into a smiling garden. The biographer of St. Remi tells us how he received certain pilgrims from Ireland and settled them in suitable places near the Marne,

where they might visit and help one another. "They did not," he says, "live only on the charity of those to whom pious Remi had commended them, but also on their own industry and the labour of their hands, in accordance with the custom of the religious bodies in Ireland. This life, united to wonderful holiness and constant prayer, won for them a great love among the natives of the country."

The Irish missionaries usually travelled in groups as it would have been dangerous in that age of violence to journey alone. The group consisted generally of a dozen individuals and their chief, who was to be the Abbot of the future settlement. They set sail first for Great Britain, and then passing through that country, re-embarked at some Kentish port for the Continent. In Europe they travelled for the most part on foot, and according to the rules of certain orders of monks could not travel in any other way, as these rules permitted only an Abbot to use a carriage of any kind. They were clad in coarse woollen garments, worn over a white tunic, their hair was tonsured from ear to ear across the front of the head and long flowing locks hung behind; they carried long staves, and bore at their sides leather water bottles and wallets in which they kept their food, writing tablets and manuscripts. They appeared thus amidst the Franks and Allemanni, speaking to them with fiery eloquence, at first through an interpreter, and afterwards in the language of the country which they acquired.

Wherever they settled down they erected little wooden huts and a church within a large enclosure. They supported life by cultivation of the land and fishing and asked for nothing for themselves but a space where they might found their settlement and, at times, a little food. They laboured all day to teach and civilise and sought to influence the people who surrounded them by precept and example. They won the people by their gentleness, earnestness and humility, and both Franks and Romans joined them, so that eventually similar colonies were formed far and near from the first settlement as a starting point.

They were men whose whole mind was devoted to the great work in which they were engaged, to the exclusion of all thoughts of their own personal interests. When King Segebert offered gifts to Columbanus, the Saint replied:—"We are followers of Christ, who has plainly said, 'Whosoever will be my disciple, let him deny himself, take up the Cross and follow me.' The things which are in your power to bestow do not attract us, for in these things there is nothing to satisfy the heart of myself and my companions. We seek not comforts, nor to dwell in fertile lands, nor to gratify the flesh. We seek for solitude and some secluded place wherein to live in penitence and devotion." They took no thought of the dangers which they might encounter in travelling to foreign and hostile peoples. A story is told in King Alfred's Chronicle of three Irish missionaries who were washed on the shores of Cornwall. "They came,"

writes Alfred, "in a boat without oars from Hibernia, whence they had stolen away, because for the love of God they would be on pilgrimage—they cared not where. The boat in which they fared was wrought of three hides and a half, and they took with them enough meat for seven nights." An old French chronicle tells of the arrival about the year 589 of two Irishmen named Caidoc and Fricor with twelve companions at the little town of Quentonvic, at the mouth of the Somme, and how they followed the great Roman road into the country, preaching the gospel on their way. They arrived at Centule (now St. Riquier) and, as the chronicler puts it, "fought on, perceiving that the inhabitants were blinded by error and iniquity, and were subjected to the most cruel slavery; they laboured with all their strength to redeem their souls and wash them in their Saviour's blood." The people could not understand the language of these missionaries, and rebelled against their teaching. They asked angrily what these adventurers, who had just escaped out of a barbarous island, were in search of, and by what right they sought to impose their laws on them. Violence would have been used towards the missionaries, were it not that a young noble named Riquier interfered in their favour. He took the strangers under his protection, and, entertained them at his house. He learned from them to love God above all things, and was filled with sorrow for his past life which he had spent as an unfruitful servant. He resigned all the



splendour of his high rank, cut the long locks which were a symbol of his nobility, and became a servant of God. Henceforth his life was one of prayer and mortification, and when he had taken orders he became the founder of the celebrated Abbey of St. Riquier, where Caidoc and Fricor were buried, and where two Latin epitaphs written by St. Angilbert commemorate their virtues and the land of their nativity.

After landing in Europe they had to go amidst people whose language was unknown to them, and though themselves often of noble descent, they found that they were poor and friendless in a strange land. It is frequently recorded how great were their sufferings from poverty, fatigue and lack of equipment, and how many met their death on the way. Yet in the service to which they had devoted themselves they bore all their trials with resignation and a stout heart. "They were competent, cheerful, and self-supporting, faced privation with indifference; caring nothing for luxuries; and when other provisions failed them, they gathered wild fruit, trapped animals, and fished with great dexterity, and with any sort of rude appliances. They were rough and somewhat uncouth in outward appearance, but beneath all that they had solid sense and much learning. Their simple ways, their unmistakeable piety, and their intense earnestness in the cause of religion attracted the people everywhere, so that they made crowds of converts."\*

\*Joyce: "Social History of Ireland," Part I., p. 341.

Near the end of the seventh and at the beginning of the eighth century the Irish monks had established a series of monasteries which extended from the mouth of the Meuse and Rhine to the Rhone. Throughout the chronicles and the lives of the Saints of this time references are often made to them; and names purely Irish are constantly found such as Caidor, Furseus, Fullan Ultan, Frillan, Livin. Thus in the life of St. Remi, mention is made of his hospitable reception of ten pilgrims from Ireland. "From that island, I say, seven brothers started on a pilgrimage for the love of Christ. They were men of great piety and virtue. These were Gebrian, Helan, Tressan, Germanus, Veranus, Hebranus, Petranus, and three sisters, Franda or Francla, Portia and Possena." In the life of St. Riquier it is recorded how a body of Irishmen preached the faith in Picardy. In Belgium they worked in Malines, Ghent and other places. In the ninth century the number of Irishmen travelling in France was so great as to be almost burthensome and the Council of Chalons-sur-Saone made canons against the wandering Scots. There is also frequent mention made in the histories of the time of 'episcopi vagi,' bishops without any fixed diocese, who journeyed through France, and of whom the great majority appear to have been our countrymen. Many of the missionary establishments in Germany were either originally Irish or were the offsprings of Irish foundations. In the tenth century we find a great number of Irish monasteries in Germany. Otho I.

of Germany consecrated a monastery in the Ardennes which was to remain the property of the Scots, and of which the Abbot was to be a monk of that nation. Adalberon II. decreed that the Abbey of St. Clement in Lorraine was only to receive monks of Irish origin, while that nation supplied sufficient recruits, and his biographer states that he always held the Irish monks in the highest esteem.\* Cologne in the tenth century possessed a large Irish colony, and the monastery of St. Martin in that city was given to the Scots in perpetuity by Archbishop Eberger in 975. From this date to 1061 the Abbots were all Irishmen. Desibod constructed the monastery of Desibodenberg near Trèves, and St. Kilian was the Apostle of Franconia. The monasteries of Honau on the Rhine and Altomunster were of Irish origin and Virgilius became the Abbot of Salzburg. That Irish monks were present in considerable numbers in the North of Italy is evidenced by the fact that a hostelry was built near Bobbio in 883 for their reception.

In South Germany Marianus Scotus, a native of the North of Ireland, settled at Ratisbon on his way to Rome and founded a monastery in 1076. In less than forty years this monastery was not sufficiently large to accommodate the Irish monks who were labouring at Ratisbon, and a second house, the monastery of St. James, was built. From Ratis-

\*Scoti et reliqui sancti peregrini semper sibi dulcissimi habebantur, Vita Alberoni II. "Monumenta Germanica," IV. p. 668.

bon twelve Irish monasteries were established in various parts of South Germany, and at the time of its greatest prosperity the Abbot of Ratisbon controlled the monasteries of Dels in Silesia, Erfurt in Thuringia, Wurzburg, Nuremberg, Eichstadt in Franconia, Memningen and Constance in Swabia, and Vienna in Austria. Johannes, one of the associates of Marianus, went to Gottweich in Austria, where he died as an Anchorite; another of his monks went to Kief, and a third went to Jerusalem. Frederick of Barbarossa found in Bulgaria a monastery governed by an Irish Abbot, and there are letters still extant from the Irish Abbot of Ratisbon petitioning King Wratislav of Bohemia for an escort for his messengers through that country on their way to Poland. There is authentic evidence that these Irish monks who went to Germany in the eleventh and thirteenth centuries were worthy successors to the Saints and Missionaries who laboured in France at an earlier period. The houses which they founded were closed to Germans, and almost entirely recruited from Ireland, so that while in France the second generation of monks was largely composed of Frenchmen, the German establishments continued to be thoroughly Irish even in the constitution of their members.

It is difficult to exaggerate the influence which the Irish Saints and Missionaries exercised at this early period upon European civilisation. The Continent was plunged in utter darkness, literary as well as spiritual, and the advent of the Irish



teachers, men full of piety and zeal, with superior accomplishments and a genuine love of learning marked the renaissance of religion and letters. "There reigned," says Mr. Lane-Poole, "not only amongst the professed, scholars of Ireland, but also amongst the plain scholars whom she sent forth to preach the gospel to the heathen, a love of literature for its own sake, and a keen delight in poetry. Apart from their written works, there is a vein of poetry running through the lives of these Irish confessors, a poetry of which the stories of their acts are better witnesses than their practical essays in verse-making. They brought imagination, as they brought spiritual life into a world well nigh sunk in materialism." Through their Latin poetry, and especially through their hymns, which were carried abroad over Europe and sung in many schools and monasteries, they may be considered to have exercised no small influence on the literatures that were just then arising from the smallest beginnings in the various nations. The Romance languages which sprang from the Latin would naturally be most directly affected, and two well-known European scholars, Zeuss and Nigra, have traced the introduction of rhyme to the Irish monks who wrote in this language. Their skill in music appears from the fact that Gertrude, daughter of Pepin, sought for Irish monks to instruct her community at Nivelles in sacred psalmody. St. Gall acquired its highest fame as a school of music, as well as a seat of learning, during the time that the Irishman Moengal pre-

sided over it, and Notker Balbulus, the most celebrated musician of the Middle Ages, was one of his pupils.

St. Columba brought the poetry and learning of Ireland to Iona, and Oswald, King of Northumbria, who had been educated there, summoned the Irish monks to convert his country. In the words of Bede:—"He sent to the seniors of the Scots, among whom himself and his fellow soldiers when in banishment had received the Sacrament of Baptism, desiring they would send him a bishop, by whose instruction and ministry the Anglic nation which he governed might be taught the advantages of faith in the Lord, and receive its sacraments. Nor were they slow in granting his request, but sent him Bishop Aidan, a man of singular meekness, piety and moderation." St. Aidan established himself at Lindisfarne, and the Irish influence was extended from there until the whole of Northumbria was supplied with monasteries and schools, and the love of study of letters was awakened amongst the people by the enthusiasm of their teachers. From the north the Irish monks penetrated into Mercia and East Anglia, and fresh bodies of missionaries came over from Ireland in a constant succession. The Irish learning found its way to the South of England, and in Archbishop Theodore's day the school of Canterbury was full of Irish scholars. An Irishman, Maelduf, founded a school, which afterwards grew into the famed Abbey of Malmesbury, and amongst his scholars

was St. Adhelm, who was pronounced by Alfred two centuries afterwards to be the best of the Anglo-Saxon poets. Glastonbury became a special centre of Irish learning and poetry, so that it may be claimed that Dunstan, the chief figure in the revival of English learning, derived from the Irish scholars, who founded the school there, the spirit which inspired the movement. "This," writes Mr. Stopford Brooke, "was the Gaelic invasion of England, and its imaginative and formative powers ran through all the poetry of Northumbria, and stimulated the desires of Wessex and Mercia to know, and to feel after the unknown."



Moulding, Tuaim Greine.

## CHAPTER VII.

### Some Famous Irish Missionaries

With a few exceptions, we have but few and meagre details of the lives and works of individual Irish missionaries who laboured in the various countries of Europe. Of that large multitude of devoted men, who went from Ireland in a continuous succession for three centuries—"the death of one apostle being but the coming of another"—the records are scanty and satisfactory, consisting mainly of casual references made by contemporary writers. The period in Europe was not favourable to the cultivation of letters, and our native annals generally do not make any reference to the Irish ecclesiastics who went abroad except in a few cases. Thus we find it recorded that Vergilius of Salzburg died in 788, Dunchadh of Cologne died A.D. 813, Gilla-na-naemh Laighen, Superior of the monastery in Wursburg, died A.D. 1085; but there is no mention made of Columbanus, Gall, Cathaldus, Fiachra, Colman or Killian.

St. Vergilius, Archbishop of Salzburg, was born, reared, and educated in Ireland, according to the testimony of Alcuin, who was almost his contemporary, but the place and date of his birth







Frontispiece to St. John's Gospel.  
 Convent of St. Arnoul, Metz.

cannot be ascertained with exactness. It appears from a statement in the *Annals of the Four Masters* that before leaving Ireland he was Abbot of Aghaboe. He arrived in France about the year 741 and spent two or three years at the Court of Pepin-le-Bref, father of the renowned Charlemagne. Pepin esteemed Vergilius highly on account of his great learning, and when he was leaving France, gave him letters of recommendation to Ottilo, Duke of Bavaria. Bavaria had at this time been partially converted to the Christian Faith by St. Boniface and the object of St. Vergilius in going to the country was to help in completing the work which St. Boniface had begun. He settled at Salzburg, and his life there was one of unceasing effort, not only for the conversion of Bavaria, but of Carinthia and the neighbouring provinces, which were still for the most part pagan. The monks of the Benedictine monastery of St. Peter at Salzburg chose him to be their Abbot, and he rebuilt the monastery in a style of great splendour. He was consecrated Bishop of Salzburg about the year 744, and he presided over the diocese for forty years. He sent many missionaries to preach the gospel throughout the country, and paid frequent visits to the newly-established churches, so as to confirm the people in the faith. He built a stately church in honour of St. Stephen, and a great basilica dedicated to St. Rudbert, the founder and first bishop of the church of Salzburg. He died about 784 and was buried in the monastery of St. Peter.

St. Vergilius was not only a great missionary saint, but was also distinguished on account of his learning, and as an astronomer he was far in advance of his age, for he held the sphericity of the earth and the existence of Antipodes long before Copernicus startled Europe with his teaching on this subject. In spite of opposition he stoutly maintained that the earth was round, that the sun passed beneath it, and that there must be inhabitants on the other side. The doctrine and other views of Vergilius were unpalatable to the ecclesiastical authorities in Germany and charges against him were brought before the Pope. He was represented as holding astronomical doctrines which were, in fact, different from those which he really advocated, and his teaching was condemned. Vergilius would appear to have explained his real tenets to the satisfaction of the Pope, for no punishment was inflicted, and he was shortly afterwards promoted to the See of Salzburg.

St. Fursey, a famous Irish missionary in France, was the son of a Munster prince named Fintan. He was trained in Connaught at a monastery on the island of Inchiquin in Lough Corrib by St. Brendan, an uncle of his father's, and by St. Meldan, who succeeded St. Brendan as head of the community. After spending some time in England St. Fursey went to the north-east of Gaul, and landed with twelve companions at the mouth of the Somme, A.D. 638. He settled for a time at Peronne, but afterwards went to Lagny-sur-Marne at the request of King Clovis II., who was desirous



of having him near his court. From the records that we possess of his life, he appears to have been a man of a quiet and retiring character. Bede describes him as being renowned both for his words and actions, as remarkable for great virtues, and as being desirous to live a pilgrim for the Lord, whenever an opportunity should offer. The same writer tells us that by the example of his virtues and the efficacy of his discourse, he converted many unbelievers to Christ, and confirmed in his faith and love those who already believed.

Though St. Fursey does not appear to have possessed the learning for which his countrymen were celebrated, there was a certain exaltation in his nature which earns for him the epithet "sublime" from the Venerable Bede. He wrote an account of his 'Visions of Heaven and Hell' which became well known in Europe, and which are the most remarkable writings of their kind anterior to the great epic poem of Dante. They show a great spiritual insight, and are full of the most excellent moral precepts. They reflect the profound religious convictions of religious men of the period, and no small amount of imaginative power is shown in the treatment of the subject. It does not seem unlikely that the great Florentine poet was acquainted with St. Fursey's 'Visions,' and derived inspiration from them in the writing of the 'Divine Comedy.' The Venerable Bede, who speaks with the greatest reverence of St. Fursey and his "Visions," was one of the writers whom Dante honoured in a special measure, and there are

parallelisms between certain of the speeches in the "Inferno" and the words used by St. Fursey which would support this conjecture.

St. Cathaldus was born about the year 615 A.D. in Munster, and went to study at the great school of Lismore. He eventually became a professor there, and the fame of his learning and virtues attracted many pupils to the school. In addition to teaching, St. Cathaldus preached the Gospel and founded churches in the country of the Desii. He was consecrated Bishop of Rachan, a locality which was probably in Munster, but which it is difficult to ascertain. When he had presided over the diocese of Rachan for some years he set out on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem with his brother Donatus and several companions. On their way homeward from Palestine the vessel in which they sailed was wrecked in the Gulf of Taranto. St. Cathaldus escaped from the wreck, and arrived at the city of Taranto. He found the city practically pagan and the effeminate and licentious inhabitants were almost entirely addicted to pleasure and vice. He preached to them in moving language, imploring them to return to the rule and practices of Christianity, and performed many striking miracles in their sight. The bishopric of Taranto happened to be vacant at the time, and the Tarentines besought the Irish Saint to assume the office, promising to follow his counsels. St. Cathaldus assented, reluctantly, in the hope that he might be able to win them back to the faith. His labours amongst them were crowned with

success, Taranto became a Christian city in reality as well as in name, and the inhabitants venerated St. Cathaldus as their patron and apostle. His remains are still preserved with great honour in the cathedral, and the inscription on his tomb, 'Cathaldus Rachan' commemorates the debt which Southern Italy owes to Southern Ireland.

St. Donatus was born of a noble family in Ireland, near the end of the eighth century, and was educated at the monastic school of Inishcaltra in Lough Derg. He became a priest, and obtained high distinction as a professor and a man of learning. He taught in Ireland for a number of years, and was raised to the dignity of a bishopric. He left Ireland to make a pilgrimage to Rome, accompanied by Andrew, a youth of a noble Irish family, who was one of his favourite pupils. They journeyed through France, visiting many places of pilgrimage, and then made their way through Switzerland and Northern Italy to Rome. They received there the blessing of the Supreme Pontiff, and, after staying for some time in the city, set out towards Tuscany on their return journey to Ireland. They arrived at Fiesole, situated on the mountains overlooking Florence, where there were at the time many churches and memorials of Christian Saints and martyrs. They stayed for a time at a monastery at Fiesole before resuming their journey, and the monks and people of the town became greatly attached to the two Irishmen on account of their kindly simple ways and great sanctity. Shortly after their arrival the

Bishop of Fiesole died, and the clergy and people resolved that Donatus should be his successor. They approached him on the subject, but Donatus who was a man truly humble of spirit, declined the office. He told them that he was only a poor pilgrim from Ireland, and that he did not wish to be their bishop as he was not fitted for the position since he hardly knew their language or customs. The clergy persisted in their request and at length Donatus consented, and was consecrated Bishop of Fiesole about 824 A.D. He became a great and successful pastor, and laboured for thirty-seven years at Fiesole, winning the love and reverence of the people. He died in the year 861. His name is still honoured at Fiesole, and his tomb and other memories of him are held in high veneration. There is extant a short Latin poem in which he recorded his love of his native land, which he had left for ever, and celebrates the beauty of its climate, the worth of the ancient race that inhabited it, famed in the pursuits of war and peace, and noted for their attachment to the faith.

Many legends have grown around the life of Saint Fridolin, the 'Wanderer.' He was born in Connaught and gained a great reputation for learning. After travelling through various parts of Ireland, he distributed his possessions amongst the poor, and went to Gaul. He entered the monastery of Saint Hilary of Poitiers, where he remained for many years. His brother monks loved and esteemed him, and elected him as their Abbot. He left Poitiers and went to



the north-east towards the Moselle founding churches on the way. Arriving at Strasburg he founded a monastery there, which was for a long time under the direction of Irish monks. Then he went to a place called Seckingen a little to the east of Basle, where he built a church, and lived for a time. His wandering and restless spirit would not allow him to remain anywhere for a lengthened period, and we find him soon again travelling through Switzerland, and converting the people of Glarus, who still bear his figure on their cantonal banner, in memory of his missionary labours in the country.

St. Aidan was the most celebrated of the missionaries trained at St. Columcille's monastery at Iona. The son of Lugair, an Irish Saint of the same lineage as St. Brigid, Aidan studied at Innis Scattery under St. Senanus, and became a monk at Iona about 630. When King Oswald sent to Iona for missionaries, the first monks sent in answer to his call obtained but little results. They said on their return, after the failure of their mission, that success was impossible amongst the barbarous and stubborn people of Northumbria. Aidan, who was listening, asked if the cause of their failure was due to the stubbornness of the people or to the severity of the monks. "Did you forget God's word," he asked, "to give them the milk first and then the meat?" All those assembled thereupon considered Aidan as fittest to undertake the abandoned mission, and he set out in obedience to their election, and fixed his home

at Lindisfarne. Thence from his monastery preachers went forth in all directions through the kingdom of Northumbria and the North. One group of missionaries went to the Valley of the Tweed. Aidan himself went on foot preaching to the people of Bernicia. King Oswald, who had spent some time with the Irish monks at Iona, acted as interpreter to the Irish missionaries in their effort to convert his thegns. The piety of Aidan was seconded by the zeal of Oswald. Churches were built and the Northumbrian people came in great numbers to hear the new teachers. Aidan lived the life that he preached to others. The gifts which he received from the king and the thegns were at once given to the poor, and his time was spent in study and preaching. He afterwards went as a missionary into the kingdom Deira, and there he exercised over King Oswini the same influence which he had held over Oswald in Northumbria. Aidan's mission in the North succeeded splendidly where the previous mission from Italy under Paulinus had failed, and Lindisfarne became a focus and centre where some of the highest art and best literary culture of the period were cherished and cultivated. He found a school in which boys of the Angles were to be taught the Christian polity. One of his pupils, Eata, became afterwards Abbot of Lindisfarne. Another was the famous Bishop St. Chadd. A third was his equally famous brother Bishop Cedda, and Diuma, first Bishop of Mercia, was a fourth. St. Aidan died in the year 651, and it is related that, when he

felt death approaching, he had a hut built against the western wall of his church at Bamborough, and expired there, leaning against a post which had been erected to buttress the wall.



quidem multorum sur

Frontispiece to St. Luke's Gospel,  
Convent of St. Arnoul, Metz.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### The Irish Schools

In early Ireland religious training and the study of letters were given at the same time. The Saints and their disciples the monks were the founders of the schools. The word 'sapiens' so frequently employed in the early literature is applied to a learned man who was versed at once in sacred and profane literature. Other training was only considered useful as serving as an auxiliary to religious education. The liberal arts, study of ancient languages and all profane culture was intended to prepare men for the study of the Divine mind contained in the Scriptures and traditions.

The School of Armagh was the oldest and one of the most celebrated of the schools of Ireland. It was founded by St. Patrick between the years 450 and 457 A.D. at the same time as the See of Armagh. A great number of students from other countries came to Armagh, attracted by the fame of its professors, and one of the wards into which the city was divided was known as the Trian Saxon or Saxon Third, because it was the residence of English students. Later in the century St. Bridget established her church and school at Kil-



dare with St. Conlaeth as its first bishop and head, and Kildare soon became one of the greatest centres of religion and learning in Ireland. St. Finnian founded the School of Clonard in 520 A.D. and thither came as his pupils the Saints who were known as the Twelve Apostles of Erin—Ciaran of Saighir, Ciaran of Clonmacnoise, Brendan of Birr, Brendan of Clonfert, Columcille, Columba of Tir-da-Glass, Mobhi of Glasnevin, Rodan of Lorrha, Laserian, Canice of Aghaboe, Senanus of Inniscathy and Ninnidh the Pious. St. Finnian is said to have had as many as three thousand pupils at Clonard. About twenty years after the foundation of Clonard, another St. Finnian founded the School of Moville. The great School of Bangor was founded by St. Comgall about the same time, and St. Bernard of Clairvaux describes it as a noble institution that was inhabited by many thousands of monks. Amongst the most illustrious of its pupils were St. Columbanus, St. Gall, and Dungal the Astronomer, and the great St. Malachy presided over it in the twelfth century. The School of Clonmacnoise was founded by St. Ciaran in 544, and took rank as one of the greatest centres of learning in Europe. Alcuin, the foremost and most representative man of letters of his time, was a pupil there, and we have still a letter in which he records his gratitude to one of his masters at Clonmacnoise, and sends a gift from the Emperor Charlemagne to the professors. The oldest of our Irish annals was written at Clonmacnoise by Tighernach, and Suibhne, another of its teachers,

who is referred to in the Saxon Chronicle as the greatest master of the Scots, assisted King Alfred at the foundation of the University of Oxford. St. Brendan founded the School of Clonfert in the year 556, and presided over it for twenty years, during which time he is said to have trained three thousand monks. The School of Lismore was founded by St. Carthach in the year 635. St. Cathaldus of Tarentum was a professor in Lismore and had under his care students from England, Gaul, and Germany. There were also celebrated schools at Aran, Durrow, Clonenagh, Cork, Derry, Emly, Glendalough, Innisfallen, Iniscaltra, Louth, Kells, Mayo, Mungret, Ross, and Tuam.

In all the greater schools of Ireland there were students from foreign lands, who were attracted by the celebrity of the Irish teachers, and the phrase '*Amandatus est ad disciplinam in Hibernia*' came to be the mark of a learned man on the Continent. Bede tells us that in 664 many of the nobility and the lower ranks of the British nation forsook their native land and went to Ireland, either for the sake of sacred study or of devoting themselves to a monastic life. Some of these became monks, while others chose rather to apply themselves to study, going about from one master's cell to another. The Irish willingly received them all, and took care to supply them with daily food without cost, and also to furnish them with books for their study and teaching free of charge.\*

\*Bede: "*Ecclesiastical History*," III., 37.

Adhelm, Bishop of Sherborne, writing forty years later to his friend Eadfrid, Bishop of Lindisfarne, who had himself been a student at one of the Irish schools, states that the English went to Ireland in crowds as numerous as bees, and asks, "why does Ireland pride herself upon a sort of priority, in that such numbers flock there from England, as if here (*i.e.* in England) upon this fruitful soil there were not an abundance of Argive or Roman masters to be found, fully capable of solving the deepest problems of religion, and satisfying the most ambitious of pupils."

Of the most celebrated Anglo-Saxon scholars and saints, many had studied in Ireland; among these were St. Egbert, the author of the first Anglo-Saxon mission to the Continent, and Willibrod, the Apostle of the Frieslanders, who had resided twelve years in Ireland. From Ireland, also, came two English priests, both named Ewald, who in 690 went as missionaries to the German Saxons, and were martyred in Germany. The celebrated St. Chadd, regarded on account of his virtue and holiness as one of the Fathers of the Anglo-Saxon Church, was educated in Mayo; and Oswald and Aldfrid, Kings of Northumbria, studied at the Irish schools. Dagobert II., King of the Austrasian Franks, was educated at Slane, and Bede tells us that Agilbert, who afterwards became Archbishop of Paris, came from France to Ireland and lived a long time there for the purpose of studying the Scriptures.

It has been pointed out by Zimmer and other

Continental scholars that the standard of learning in the great Irish schools was much higher than in Italy. It was derived without interruption from the learning of the fourth century, from men such as St. Ambrose, St. Jerome, and St. Augustine. The pupils had an opportunity of free access to the works of the great Christian writers, and were also well trained in classical studies. In monasteries like Bangor the range of instruction was a wide one, and it must have been a thoroughly equipped and vigorous seat of learning in the latter half of the sixth century when it could have despatched such a trained and even elegant scholar as Columbanus to convert the pagans of France. His learning and scholarship are manifest to any student of his writings. He has left us good Latin verses, full of quaint metrical conceits in the classical and monastic rhyming style, and allusions to pagan and Christian antiquity are frequent in his poems. It is sufficient, as M. d'Arbois de Jubainville says, to glance at his writings, to recognise immediately his superiority over Gregory of Tours and the Gallo-Romans of his time. "He lived in close converse with the classical authors, as later did the learned men of the sixteenth century, whose equal he certainly was not, but of whom he is the precursor." He must, too, have acquired this scholarship in Ireland, because his life on the Continent was one of vigorous and all-absorbing effort which left him no time for such studies, and the country in which he worked was plunged in



literary and spiritual darkness, and could not present any opportunities for culture.

M. Darmesteter writes that "The classic tradition, to all appearances dead in Europe, burst out in full flower in the Isle of Saints, and the Renaissance began in Ireland, 700 years before it was known in Italy. During three centuries Ireland was the asylum of the higher learning which took sanctuary there from the uncultured States of Europe. At one time, Armagh, the religious capital of Christian Ireland, was the metropolis of civilisation." The Irish schools did not confine their courses to the study of sacred literature and the classics. They sent forth St. Virgilius, a great geometer who taught the sphericity of the earth and the existence of the Antipodes, Dicuil who wrote a complete Geography of the World as then known, and Dungal who gained fame as an astronomer.

There were two classes of schools in Ireland, ecclesiastical and lay. The ecclesiastical or monastic schools were intended principally for the study of the Sacred Scriptures, theology, and the classics, while the lay schools were occupied with the teaching of the language, literature, laws, and antiquities of Ireland. Each of the two classes of schools had its separate and distinct mission, yet they worked together harmoniously, and many laymen received their education in the monasteries. While the learned men were for the most part ecclesiastics, we find that laymen had an important rôle in education, and that nearly all

the poets, physicians, lawyers, artists and historians were laymen. The lay schools succeeded to the schools which had been governed by the Druids before the introduction of Christianity to Ireland, and the Christian Ollaves or doctors who taught in them were the successors of the wise men who directed the training and education of the people of pagan Ireland.

The course of education was divided into seven stages, or as they were called the "seven degrees of wisdom," which corresponded with the term periods in a modern university. A student who had passed through the various degrees and attained to the highest grade was known as an 'Ollave or Doctor.' In the Bardic schools the course extended over twelve years, and an Ollave poet had to possess a knowledge of seven kinds of verse, and to be able to compose extemporaneously in each. In addition he was required to know by heart three hundred and fifty legendary poems for recitation in public. He took rank at the head of the learned professions and was considered to be the equal of kings and bishops in social dignity and importance. The profession of the poet was highly esteemed and very popular, so much so that Keating tells that in the middle of the sixth century nearly a third of the men of Ireland belonged to the poetic order. The Ollave Brehon, who corresponded to a Judge of the High Court in our own day, had also to pass through a long and severe course of study, and had to be conversant with the intricate and complicated rules of the

Brehon Code, which regulated almost every relation of human life in Ireland, and extended to many subjects with which modern systems of law do not concern themselves.

There were laws framed to govern the various systems of education, and when one considers how admirable they were and how splendid was the material that these teachers had, in a people who had a great natural aptitude and love of learning, it is but little wonder that the Irish schools became famous in Europe. The greatest care was taken that the masters in the various subjects should be competent teachers. Nothing can be more beautiful than the ideas which prevailed as to the relation between pupil and master. The master owed the pupil "instruction without reservation and correction without harshness" and to feed and clothe him during the time he was at his learning. In return the pupil was bound to help the master against poverty, and to support him, if necessary, in old age. Learning was held in the highest esteem, and an Ollave sat next to the King at table, and was privileged to wear the same number of colours in his clothes as a monarch. Great feasts were often arranged in honour of the men of learning, and all the poets, brehons, and lawyers were invited to be present.

Plain living and high thinking went together in the schools. A few of the students resided in the school itself, but the great majority of the scholars resided in small houses in the neighbourhood built by themselves or by a former generation

of students. Some of the poorer students lived in the houses of people in the vicinity of the school, and were maintained and educated without any charge. Others lived in the houses with their wealthier classfellows, and waited upon them, receiving their food and clothing as a recompense. Sometimes even rich and nobly born scholars chose to do this by way of discipline and as a preparation for a life of austerity. A story is told of the schooldays of Adamnan, the celebrated Abbot of Iona and the biographer of St. Columba, who was connected with the noblest families in the North of Ireland, which illustrates this feature of school life and shows the Spartan simplicity in which the students were trained. Some time before he succeeded to his kingdom, King Finaghta the Festive was riding one day in the direction of the School of Clonard with certain of his attendants, and they overtook Adamnan, then a little boy, carrying a jar of milk on his back. In attempting to make way for the horsemen, the lad stumbled and fell, spilling the milk and breaking the jar. Finaghta rode on, without noticing the accident, but the boy ran after him, greatly troubled and bearing in his hand a fragment of the broken jar. He succeeded in attracting the King's attention, and Finaghta, amused by his troubled looks, questioned him in a kindly way as to the cause. The boy, not knowing his questioner, replied to him, " Indeed, good man, I have great cause to be troubled. There are living in one house near the school three noble students, and three others that



wait upon them, of whom I am one; and the three of us have in our turn to collect provisions in the neighbourhood for the whole six. It was my turn to-day; and lo, what I had obtained has been lost; and this vessel which I borrowed has been broken, and I have not the means to pay for it." Finaghta consoled the lad, assuring him that his loss would be made good, and promising that he would be careful of his welfare in the future. When he became King he was faithful to his promise, and summoned Adamnan to his court, where he became his friend and spiritual adviser.



Initial "I N." Book of Kells.

## CHAPTER IX.

### The Irish Learning

One of the most distinguished and learned of Irish Archæologists\* has remarked that we must draw from foreign depositories the materials on which to rest the proofs that Ireland of old was really entitled to that literary eminence which natural feeling lays claim to. Nearly all our domestic evidences of advanced learning have been swept away and destroyed. Hence our real knowledge of Irish teachers and scholars who migrated to the Continent, and became masters of foreign monasteries abroad, is derived from foreign chronicles, and their testimony is borne out by the evidence of the numerous Irish manuscripts and other relics of the period from the eighth to the tenth century occurring in libraries throughout Europe.

Irish manuscripts are at present to be found in the Ambrosian Library at Milan, in Turin and Naples, which are said to have been brought originally from Bobbio. Such Irish foundations as Bobbio were for many centuries fed from the monasteries in Ireland, and in the ninth century

\*Doctor Reeves.

and afterwards books were often brought abroad from the Mother Country. We find that Dungal made donations of books to Bobbio, and that when an Irish bishop and his nephew visited the monastery of St. Gall on their return from Rome in 841, they decided to remain there till death, and bequeathed their books to the monastery. At Schaffhausen there is a manuscript in perfect preservation of Adamnan's 'Life of St. Columba' which was brought from the Irish foundation at Reichenau. Many Irish manuscripts were found in Bavaria, and as Dr. Reeves observes, they might be considered as a small instalment in discharge of the old debt that the country owed to Ireland for her missionary services. Vienna possesses manuscripts from Ratisbon, and a copy of the Epistles of St. Paul written by Marianus Scotus "for his pilgrim brethren." In Trèves there are two Irish manuscripts brought from Honau. At Cambrai there is a Codex finely ornamented in the Celtic style, which contains canons of the Irish Council held in A.D. 684, and in the monastery of St. Autbert in that city is a 'Life of St. Brigid' that came from Longford. In the public library of Leyden there is a Priscian written by Dubthach about 838, a fragment of the New Testament is preserved in the University of Utrecht, and the Royal Library in Brussels contains the large collection of Irish manuscripts brought from Louvain.

The attainments of the Scots were considered as astonishing for that age. They had, as M.

d'Arbois de Jubainville has shown,\* a good knowledge of Greek, and they appear to have been the only people then in Western Europe who possessed this knowledge. They had Graeco - Latin Glossaries, Greek Grammars, and the books of the Bible in Greek accompanied by Latin translations. One of them, John Scotus Erigena, was a disciple of Plato, whose *Timæus* he appears to have read in the original text, and he was the founder of a system of philosophy derived from the doctrines of the celebrated Greek philosopher. It was considered good taste amongst the Irish scholars and the other learned men of this period to scatter Greek words through the Latin text which they composed, and this practice points to a certain acquaintance with the language. John Scotus Erigena went even further than this, and wrote verses entirely in Greek. A manuscript in the library of Laon, written by an Irish scribe between the years 850 and 900, contains two glossaries of the Greek and Latin languages, with occasional passages in the Irish language, and also a Greek Grammar. It is believed to have been included in the library of Charles the Bald.

They were also famed for their subtlety in argument and boldness in speculation. In these qualities they were distinguished from the Saxon scholars, who were invited to the Court of Charlemagne, by the Emperor acting on the advice of Alcuin. Cardinal Newman has remarked that as

\*Introduction à l'étude de la Littérature Celtique, Livre III., p. 379.



Rome was the centre of authority in these ages, so Ireland was the native home of speculation. In this respect they were remarkably contrasted with the English, as they are now—"the Englishman was hard-working, plodding, bold, determined, persevering, obedient to law and precedent, and if he cultivated his mind, he was literary and classical rather than scientific, for literature involves in it the idea of prescription. On the other hand, in Ireland the intellect seems rather to have taken the line of science, and we have various instances to show how fully this was recognised in these times, and with what success it was carried out. 'Philosopher' is in these times almost the name for an Irish monk." The monks of the two nations were distinct, and even antagonistic in talent, and there are evidences of jealousies and rivalries—"the repugnance between the plain solid English temperament and the more adventurous speculative genius of the Celt." The Irish scholars were alluded to as "Egyptians" on account of their leaning towards mysticism and Neo-Platonism, as we learn from a letter from Alcuin to Charlemagne in which he writes "*Nescio quis subintroduxit Aegyptos tibi.*"

In the ninth and tenth centuries Ireland sent a great number of teachers to the Continental schools, and all the more because great as was the fame of its earlier schools, it had then few flourishing homes of learning of its own. The names of many of these professors have not been preserved, but the reputation which they

gained on the Continent is evidenced in many ways. Thus we find that when the Emperor Frederick the Second was about to set up the University of Naples, he sent to Ireland for the learned Peter to be its first Rector, that an Irishman, Clemens, succeeded Alcuin as the Rector of the Studium at Paris, and that in the same age the Irish John was sent by Charlemagne to found the School of Pavia.

The chief representative of Ireland and philosophy at the Carolovingian Court was John Scotus Erigena. We know little of him until the time that we find him an intimate of the palace of Charles the Bald in 851, and the date of his birth and place of education are matters of surmise. He was at that time well known in France as a distinguished scholar, so that he must have been for some time resident there. Charles, who had few of the great qualities of his famous grandfather, Charlemagne, has at least the distinction of being, like him, a noble patron of letters. Stories are told of the terms of intimacy that existed between Charles and John Scotus which do equal credit to the kindness of the one and the wit and freedom of the other.

Certain reputed works of Dionysius the Areopagite had been sent by Pope Paul I. to Pepin-le-Bref, and a splendid manuscript of the mystical writings of the same author was subsequently presented to Louis the Pious by the Byzantine Emperor Michael. The works were in the Greek language, and the greatest scholars of France were

unable to interpret their meaning. Amongst others the task was entrusted to Hilduin, Abbot of St. Denis, and the learned Abbot had to confess his inability to produce a satisfactory version. This was considered all the more regrettable as Dionysius was regarded as the patron saint of France, and the great Abbey of St. Denis had been named after him. The task was finally entrusted to John Scotus, and he produced a satisfactory version, and it thus became the lot of an Irishman to introduce the works of a Greek mystic of the East to the knowledge of a Franco-Roman King. The learned Anastasius, the Papal librarian, on reading the version of John Scotus, wrote to the King expressing his surprise "that a barbarian who hailed from the extreme confines of the world, and who might have been deemed to be as ignorant of Greek as he was remote from civilisation, could have proved capable of comprehending such mysteries and translating them into another tongue." So much did the reputed writings of Dionysius puzzle all others, that the Irishman's faithful and literal rendering was regarded as an interpretation which itself required an interpretation.

John Scotus took a prominent part in the philosophical and theological disputes of his time, and always proved a formidable opponent. When the Latin Fathers fail him in his arguments, he appeals to the Greek writers, and when he cannot have recourse to the Christian writers, he takes refuge amidst the philosophers. He sometimes,

pityingly, ascribes the alleged mistakes or differences of his opponents to their ignorance of the Greek language. The varied nature of his studies was not without its effect on him, and he often mingles divinity with platonic philosophy, and fell into grave errors in his speculation. He was not, of course, an ecclesiastic, nor was he a sound theologian. His bold and inquiring mind had come to consider that even the most sacred mysteries were within his comprehension, and he met with inevitable failure when he theorised concerning the nature and attributes of the Deity, grace and predestination, the future state of reward and punishment and other subjects. "He sailed," says Dr. Healy, "through unknown seas where there was no chart to guide him. His daring spirit essayed untravelled realms of thought, and in the quest of truth he often followed wandering fires; yet, as he himself tells us, in the light of God's revelation, and the strength of his grace, the wearied spirit always found its homeward way again. He was, in reality, the first of the schoolmen, and his very errors, like the wanderings of every explorer in a new country, served to guide those who came after him."

Few philosophers have obtained so high a reputation for wisdom in their own age as John Scotus Erigena. The strange legends which have grown around his life tend to show the awe in which his learning was held by his contemporaries. He gained fame as a philosopher, a poet, and a theologian, and men looked with wonder at this



prodigy, who could write Greek verses, and expound the Scriptures in the Hebrew, who was familiar with Aristotle and Plato, as well as with the Fathers of the Church, who was Rector of the Royal School of Paris, and also professor of dialectics and mathematics. He was known in his own time, and long after as "The Master," and was looked upon as "a miracle of knowledge." "That single mind that Ireland sent to Gaul surpassed all others in acuteness," said his friend Prudentius, expressing the estimation which the great Irishman gained amongst the learned. The resemblance between the Greek mind and the Irish has sometimes been observed, and it has been noted that the scholars of both these nations were characterised by quickness and subtlety, love of speculation, and power of abstraction and generalisation. John Scotus, who was in many respects a typical Celt, had, by close study, imbued himself with the spirit of the Neo-Platonistic philosophy, and had thus, by nature and training, become intensely Greek in his outlook and methods of thought. It was this characteristic of his teaching and language that made them appear so strange to the Latins, and that induced them to father on him many errors and ideas for which he was not in reality responsible. Renan regards him as the most original figure of his century, the greatest mind of the period. In the breadth of his philosophic outlook, his knowledge of philology, and his acquaintance with the Greek language, which was such as no member of the Latin races outside Italy possessed

during the whole of the Middle Ages, he is a unique exception to the men of his time, a strange apparition for which nothing that has gone before prepares us, and which remains isolated in the history of the human intellect. It is true that the position that he held as a philosopher has been weakened, but, as Renan points out, when one considers his time, he is a still greater wonder as a philologist than as a philosopher. He has, in this regard, antecedents, and his antecedents are to be found in the Irish schools. It was not necessary for him to travel to Athens in order to learn Greek, as his legend supposes, for he found in his own country the best Hellenistic school that the Latin Middle Ages had. He made grave errors in philosophy, and they were justly censured, but they were not advanced in any recalcitrant spirit, and unlike Abelard and others who followed him, John the Irishman did not show any ambition to become the leader of a small body of sectaries. Unlike them, too, he wore his high distinction with modesty, and one who knew him intimately tells us that he was a holy and an humble man filled with the Spirit of God. "He was loved," writes Dr. Healy, "and honoured by friends who knew him, and misjudged both during his life and after his death by many who knew neither the man himself nor his writings . . . . For ages he was lost to view, but in our own time he is seen shining again in the literary heavens with even more than his ancient splendour."

The monk, Dungal, who gained glory as a theologian, an astronomer and a poet was, like Columbanus, a pupil of the great school of Bangor. The same obscurity surrounds his early years as in the cases of Columbanus and John Scotus, and he does not emerge into fame until we find him already recognised as a notable personality in the French schools. He appears to have gone to France in the early years of the ninth century, attracted by the reputation which Charlemagne had gained as a patron of learning. In the year 811 he addressed a remarkable letter to Charlemagne on two solar eclipses which had taken place in the previous year. He seems at this time to have been a member of the community of St. Denis, and it may be inferred from the tone of his letter to the Emperor that he was intimate with him and was held in high esteem on account of his learning. While Dungal's explanation of the eclipses is not scientifically correct in all points, it is, in the main, sufficiently accurate, and, considering the time at which it was written, it justifies the high estimation in which he was held as an astronomer. The letter also shows a wide acquaintance with the classical authors who had treated this subject, and proves that Dungal was one of the first Latinists of his age. An eulogy of Charlemagne, and certain smaller poems of Dungal that have been preserved are evidence that he was possessed of a fine classical taste.

He is principally remembered, however, on

account of his famous controversy with Claudius, Bishop of Turin, on the subject of image worship. The Council of Nice had defined the position of the Church with regard to the use of images, but many of the bishops of France held heterodox views on the subject, and a controversy was carried on with much heat in the Frankish empire during the first quarter of the ninth century. Foremost amongst those who held heterodox views was Claudius of Turin, whose opinions concerning the use of images were similar to those which were afterwards held by the Calvinists and the English Puritans of the seventeenth century. Claudius went so far as to remove the crosses from his cathedral, and to break the images of the saints and the holy pictures on the walls. A friend, the Abbot Theodimir, wrote to Claudius reminding him how unworthy it was of a Christian bishop to insult the Cross of Christ, and to dishonour the images of the Saints and Martyrs. This letter only provoked a furious reply from Claudius, and it was the reply that induced Dungal to appear as a champion of orthodoxy, and to produce a treatise setting forth the doctrines of the Church on the whole matter. He was at the time residing at Pavia, and he tells us that many times since his arrival in Italy, he had just cause to complain when he saw the field of the Lord overgrown with tares, yet he held his peace with grief and pain. He could, however, do so no longer when he saw the Church distracted and the people seduced by deceivers. He sets out clearly



the points at issue, and then proceeded to demolish the arguments of Claudius, and to prove the Catholic doctrine and practice, "which for 820 years or more was followed by the blessed Fathers, by most religious princes, and by all Christian households."

In his treatise Dungal shows a great knowledge of Sacred Scriptures and the Fathers of the Church. It is composed in a Latin style, which is not excelled by any writer of the age, and Muratori says that it is remarkable both on account of the width of learning it discloses, and of the manner in which it is written. It fully achieved its purpose, and after Dungal's vigorous refutation of Claudius, the Iconoclastic party in the Church were not afterwards heard of. By his able advocacy of the truth, Dungal rendered a signal service to the Church, and it is doubtful whether any ecclesiastic of his day could have discharged the task so well and so successfully. Cardinal Newman pays him a well-deserved tribute in his description of the work which Irishmen did in passing on the tradition of civilisation to France. "When," he writes, "the heretical Claudius of Turin exulted over the ignorance of the devastated churches of the Continent, and called the Synod of Bishops who summoned him to appear before them 'a congregation of asses,' it was no other than the Irish Dungal, a monk of St. Denis, who met and overthrew the presumptuous railer."

Towards the end of his life, Dungal retired to the monastery that was founded by St. Colum-

banus at Bobbio, and to this monastery he bequeathed his books at his death. They were transferred to Milan by Cardinal Borromeo, and now form part of the Ambrosian Library. Amongst them is an Antiphonary which appears to have been in use in Bangor.

Another famous man of learning, Dicuil the Geographer, has left us in his treatise *De Mensura Orbis Terrarum* one of the most interesting and valuable monuments of Irish scholarship in the ninth century, a book which is in itself a sufficient proof of the culture of our native schools at that period. From a few incidental references which he makes to himself in this treatise he appears to have been trained at the great school of Clonmacnoise at the time when Suibhne was professor there, and to have subsequently visited the Irish foundations at Iona and the islands on the West of Scotland. He shows an acquaintance with the best authorities on his subject, including the Report of the Commissioners who were sent to survey the Roman Empire by the Emperor Theodosius, the Natural History of Plinius Secundus, the Geography of Caius Julius Solinus, and a little known work of Priscian. When writing of the Nile he tells us that he derived his knowledge of the canalisation of this river from the narrative of certain Irish clerics and laymen who had sailed up it for a long way on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. He gives the measurement of one of the Egyptian Pyramids which was supplied to him by his countryman Brother Fidelis. He also gives an

interesting description of Iceland, and shows that it was known to Irish monks more than fifty years before the Danes or Norwegians discovered the island, a fact that is now admitted by scholars familiar with Icelandic literature and history. "A certain trustworthy monk" told him of the existence of the Faroe Islands, and how he had reached one of them by sailing for two summer days and one summer night in a vessel with two benches of rowers, and discovered that for almost a century there had dwelt on these islands hermits from Ireland. Dicuil goes on to say that he had never found these islands mentioned by any previous writer.

It is, as Dr. Healy notes, an interesting fact that we should find an Irish monk, in the beginning of the ninth century, collating and criticising the various works on geography that had been written by the best known Latin writers who had preceded him in treating of the subject. The information which he gives us, derived from his own personal knowledge, or gathered from the narrations of his countrymen, is also valuable as proving how far the Irish monks travelled in their missionary efforts.

Another Irish scholar who gained distinction as a man of learning was Sedulius Scotus, the Commentator on Scripture. A Greek psalter written by him which has been preserved at Montfancon shows his acquaintance with the Greek language. He was also an accomplished Latin poet, and in his writings on the Sacred Scriptures shows a

wonderful knowledge of the writings of the Fathers of the Church. A treatise on Politics written by him was discovered some time ago in the Vatican library and published by Cardinal Mai. He is said, in addition, to have written grammatical commentaries on Priscian and Donatus, which were used in the Irish schools.



Initial letter "R." Book of Kells.







Portion of Illuminated Monogram.  
Book of Kells.

## CHAPTER X.

### Early Christian Art in Ireland

Christian Art in Ireland attained its highest excellence in four branches: the writing and ornamentation of manuscripts, metal-work, stone-carving, and building. It should be remembered that there was a native art in Ireland even before Christianity came to the country, and that the pagan Irish had highly developed the art of working in bronze, silver, gold, and enamel before St. Patrick's time. From the pagan period we have torques, brooches, gorgets, and combs with characteristic ornamentation, and the delicate craftsmanship and purity of taste displayed in the early Celtic ornaments has often been noted. A well-known authority\* stated that two of the fragments of a bronze ornament of the pre-Christian period might challenge comparison for beauty of design and execution with any specimens of cast bronze work that it had ever been his fortune to see. The character of the arts introduced into Ireland with Christianity was therefore grafted upon and modified by the arts as already practised by the people, and new variations of design were introduced from

\*Mr. Kemble.



the Continent by the missionaries and the foreign artists who came in their train. The arts, too, were assiduously cultivated by the people, and Ferdinand Keller's remarks on the manner in which the excellence of the Irish school of calligraphy was obtained are also applicable to the other arts. They attained a high degree of cultivation, which certainly did not result from the genius of single individuals, but from the emulation of numerous schools, and the improvements of several generations.

The position which the artist and the craftsman held in society, is an indication of how the arts were loved and esteemed in Ireland. The title of scribe is frequently used in our ancient literature to enhance the dignity of a bishop, and we find that St. Conlaeth, the first Bishop of Kildare, was a skilled worker in metals. St. Dega was also a celebrated artificer and scribe; one of St. Patrick's three smiths was Fortchern, son of Laery, King of Ireland; and it is stated in the Trepartite Life that the holy Bishop Assicus was his coppersmith. A builder of churches was entitled under the Brehon Laws to the same compensation for any injury done to his person as the lower rank of nobles, and the artist who worked for a king could claim half the amount payable to the king himself in a similar case. The greatest care was taken that the workers in the various arts should be competent craftsmen, and they had to possess a certificate of proficiency from the Ollave or Chief Artist.



Under such conditions a native art was developed in Ireland to a high degree of perfection and its characteristics have been described as "the union of primitive rhythmical designs with a style which accords with the highest laws of the arts of design, the exhibition of a fine architectural feeling in the distribution of parts, and such delicate and perfect execution, whatever the material in which the art was treated, as must command respect for the conscientious artist by whom the work was carried out."\* The conversion of the island to Christianity gave a new energy and inspiration to the imaginative powers of the race, and a new impulse that was felt in all branches of the national life, more especially in the cultivation of the arts.

The art of illumination was the first to be cultivated in Christian Ireland, and it was brought to a higher degree of perfection than any of the other arts. It reached its highest excellence at the close of the seventh and at the beginning of the eighth century. The designs and ornamentation used are not entirely of native origin, but the Irish school is distinguished from Celtic work elsewhere by a fine judgment displayed in the use of ornamentation, a delicate and refined taste, and a knowledge of architectural design. The interlaced patterns were probably introduced from Northern Italy and Southern Gaul; the spirals, zigzags and other designs belong to the pre-Christian Art of Ireland; and they were gradually grafted on the style introduced by the Christian missionaries. The writing

\*Stokes: "Early Christian Art in Ireland," Preface.

was done with the quills of birds, and the inks used were of various colours, blended together with great artistic effect. Sixty-one remarkable scribes are mentioned in the Annals of the Four Masters as having flourished in Ireland before the year 900. The distinctively Irish art of illumination has often been confused with Anglo-Saxon Art from the fact that many manuscripts written in Anglo-Saxon were illuminated by Irish artists, or by monks who had learned the art in Ireland. The Irish monks who went to Iona, Melrose, Lindisfarne and other places in Great Britain had been trained in this art, and taught it to the peoples amongst whom they lived. An Anglo-Saxon monk, Ethelwulf, tells of an Irish missionary named Ultan, who worked in England in the eighth century, and who was unrivalled in the art of illumination, and the influence of Irish artists is plainly discernible in many of the manuscripts preserved in the British Museum and the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge.

The art of working in metal attained its highest excellence in the period from the ninth to the twelfth century. The designs employed are similar to those used in the illumination of manuscripts, and while we find that the artists sometimes followed foreign models, they undoubtedly achieved their best work in the examples which we still possess that are Irish both in form and design. The best work in stone-carving appears to have been done about the tenth century, as the Annalists do not refer to the High Crosses

until that time. The builder's art in Ireland reached its perfection about the twelfth century, when from very rude and simple buildings there was developed the beautiful style of architecture known as the Irish Romanesque.

The first art, that of the scribe, was carried to a state of perfection in Christian Ireland that has never been surpassed. Writing was one of the most important occupations of the Irish monks. They had to supply the numerous churches which sprang into existence with books for the various religious services, and they bestowed great labour on the ornamentation of the sacred writings, which are wonderful monuments of their conceptions, skill, and patience. The symmetry of their hand-writing is remarkable, and the shading and tinting of the letters is managed with the greatest skill and taste. A distinguished German critic, Ferdinand Keller, states that there is not a single letter of the entire alphabet which does not give evidence, both in its general form and its minuter parts, of the sound judgment and taste of the penman.

The art of illumination originated in Byzantium, and penetrated through the North of Italy to Gaul and Ireland. In the ancient literature of Ireland there are to be met with fragments that appear to be translations from certain versions of the rules, and manuals, which the Byzantine artists drew up for the guidance of their disciples. Though the Irish scribes did not originate this art, they made it characteristically their own, and brought it to



a much higher grade of perfection than it reached in Byzantium, Italy, or Gaul. They combined the Byzantine interlacings with the native designs, producing new and varied patterns, and developing novel and intricate forms of great beauty and symmetry. Their work is now known as the 'Opus Hibernicum,' and splendid specimens of it are found in Ireland itself, and in the Continental libraries. One of the finest specimens that have been preserved for us is the Book of Kells, a vellum manuscript of the Four Gospels in Latin dating from the seventh or eighth century, and, probably, the most beautiful book ever written. Miss Margaret Stokes says of it: "No effort hitherto made to transcribe any one page has the perfection of execution and rich harmony of colour which belongs to this wonderful book . . . as with the skeleton of a leaf or with any microscopic work of nature, the stronger the magnifying power brought to bear upon it the more is this perfection revealed." Professor Westwood of Oxford described it as the most astonishing book of the Four Gospels that exists in the world. "I know," he writes, "pretty well all the libraries in Europe, where such books as this occur, but there is no such book in any of them . . . there is nothing like it in all the books which were written for Charlemagne and his immediate successors."

Besides the Book of Kells we have as specimens of the exquisite Irish art of illumination the Book of Durrow, the Book of Armagh, the Stowe Missal,



the Book of MacDurnan, the Garland of Howth, the Book of Dimna, and the Book of St. Moling. The Book of Durrow shows fewer varieties of design than the Book of Kells, but those which it does display belong to the most ancient and characteristic style of Irish Art. The ornamental portions of the Book of Armagh equal, if they do not in some points surpass, the grace and delicate execution of the Book of Kells. It was written by a scribe named Ferdomnach, and the record of his death in the 'Annals of the Four Masters' points to the fact that even at the finest period of this art in Ireland, he was recognised as an artist of superior power. His death is recorded as follows:—"A.D. 844, Ferdomnach, a sage and choice scribe of the Church of Armagh, died." In the 'Garland of Howth' the art of decoration is larger and bolder than we usually meet in Irish manuscripts.

The designs and ornaments used by the artists who worked in metal in Ireland after the introduction of Christianity were similar to those used in the manuscripts, and they showed the same exquisite skill and taste. The most beautiful specimens of their art that have been preserved are the Tara Brooch, the Ardagh Chalice, and the Cross of Cong. "The Tara Brooch," says Dr. Petrie, "is superior to any hitherto found in the variety of its ornaments and in the exquisite delicacy and perfection of its execution." The Ardagh Chalice is an almost unique example of the two-handled chalice used in the earliest

Christian time. A few two-handled chalices have been found on the Continent, but no example has been hitherto found in Great Britain of the same type as this beautiful chalice. The chalice is richly ornamented, and the ornamental designs upon the cup belong to the period when Celtic Art had reached its highest perfection. There are about forty different varieties of design on the chalice, all of which "show a freedom of inventive power and play of fancy only to be equalled by the work on the Tara Brooch." We do not know the name of the artist who executed either of these beautiful objects, nor the name of the king or ecclesiastic for whom they were wrought, and we owe the discovery of both to accident. A child playing on the sea-shore near Drogheda found the Tara Brooch, and a boy digging potatoes near the old Rath of Ardagh in Limerick found the Ardagh Chalice. In the case of the Cross of Cong, a series of inscriptions along the sides of the cross gives its history. From these we learn that it was made to the order of Turlogh O'Connor, King of Connaught for the Church of Tuam, then governed by Archbishop Muredach O'Duffy, and that the artist was Maelisa Mac Braddan O'Hechan. The cross which is two feet six inches high, and measures one foot six inches across the arms, is made of oak covered with plates, and is elaborately ornamented. Along the edges thirteen jewels were disposed at regular intervals, and nine jewels adorned the face of the shaft and arms. The shaft terminates below in the grotesque head of an







The West Side of the Cross at Monasterboice.



animal beneath which is a spherically ornamented ball in which was inserted the pole for carrying the cross.

The Irish artists who worked in metal have also left us many beautiful crosiers elaborately wrought, shrines for the lives and relics of venerated saints, and other articles which show that they had attained a complete mastery of material. The Shrine of St. Manchan was considered to be one of the most beautiful productions of Celtic Art. The Crosier of Lismore is a magnificent example of the work of our goldsmiths, and the cases made to contain the Gospels of St. Molaise and the Stowe Missal, show the high standard that had been attained in ornamental and decorative designs in the eleventh century.

The skill of the Irish Artists in stone-carving is principally shown in the great stone crosses, of which about forty-five remain. The earliest work of this kind in Ireland were the lapidary inscriptions in Roman lettering placed over the tombs of the dead in the first years of Christianity, and it dates from a time before the Irish artists in stone had time to form a style of their own. They seem, as Miss Stokes points out, to be rather the occasional and tentative efforts of men who derived their knowledge of letters from various sources abroad. At a later period we find that Ireland became the home of pilgrims and students of various nationalities who sought refuge there from the disorders and lawlessness that prevailed in Europe. It is to these foreign influences that we

may trace the fine relief work on the High Crosses, which shows an acquaintance with the early Christian Art of the Roman and Byzantine Schools and their systems of iconography. The art was practised by the Scotch, the Anglo-Saxons and the Welsh, and while we find the same ornamental material used by the stone-workers of these countries, it only requires a comparison of the existing monuments to show how much superior the Irish artists were to the contemporary artists of England, Scotland, and Wales. The beautiful results attained in Ireland were due to the fact that the people possessed a fine artistic instinct. They knew how to use their decoration in the right place, and so that it should add to the effect of the fundamental form to be adorned, and they held it in subordination to the primary idea which they wished to express in their art.

Examples of this art are found throughout Ireland. The celebrated High Cross of Tuam was considered by Dr. Petrie to rank as the finest monument of its class and age remaining in Ireland. The beautiful stone cross at Clonmacnoise was erected to commemorate the foundation of the greatest of the churches there, and to mark the sepulchre of King Flann its pious founder. The sculptures on the west side of the shaft represent St. Kevin and King Diarmuid in the act of the erection of the small Church of St. Kevin, and on the opposite side several events in the life of Our Saviour are represented in relief. On one of the two crosses at Monasterboice the panels represent the

Fall of Man, the Expulsion from Eden, the Death of Abel, the Crucifixion, and the Last Judgment. There are three sculptured crosses at Kells and there are also fine specimens at Durrow and Cashel. The form in each case is that of the Latin Cross with the circle, a characteristically Irish feature, surrounding the arms of the cross. The panels are enclosed with ornaments similar to those in the manuscripts, and these are reproduced in stone with a delicacy and a lightness of touch that show the highest artistic skill. There are forty-five high crosses still remaining in Ireland, and thirty-two of these are richly ornamental. They date from a period extending from the tenth to the thirteenth century, and in their system of representation of Biblical scenes the types appear to have been drawn from the Byzantine and Latin guides which were written for the purpose of assisting Christian artists in their selection and treatment of sacred subjects. Sometimes we find associated with religious subjects, scenes from royal processions, hunting scenes, trumpeters and harpers, and other types taken from the ordinary life of the people.

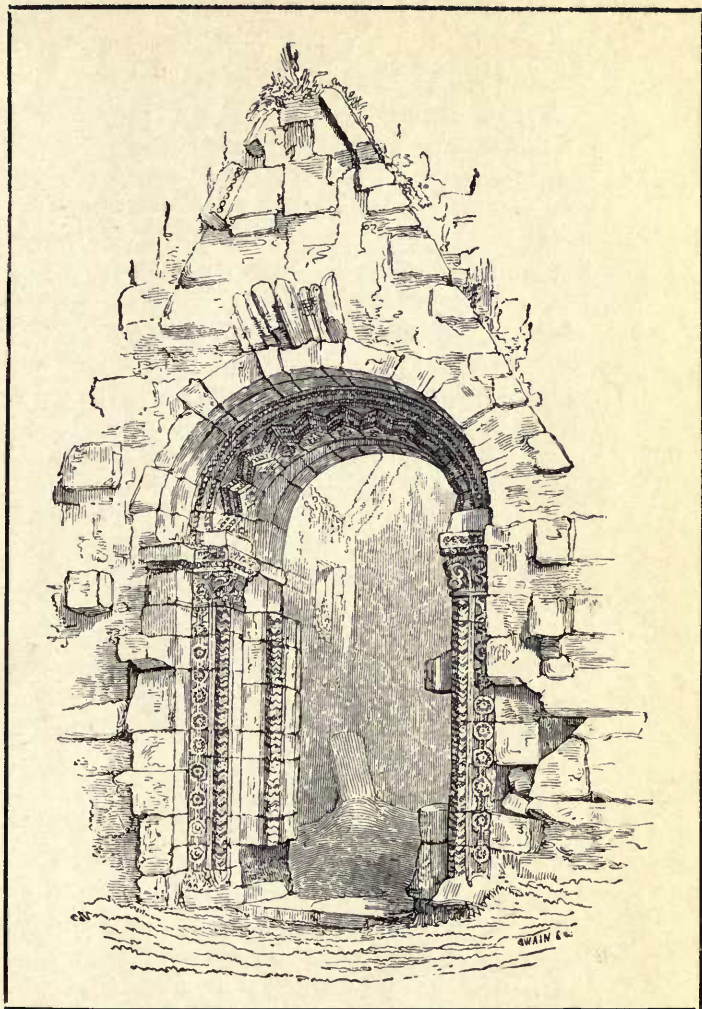
The first Christian architecture in Ireland was developed from the style of buildings that had been used by the pagan inhabitants of the country. The Christian missionaries adopted the same style of building that was practised by the natives at the time of their coming, and gradually made such modifications as their different purposes required. They built their

small oratories and round bee-hive huts within the boundaries of the stone fort or cashel. The oratories of the period were angular oblong structures with the walls sloping in a curve towards the roof. They measure on the average fourteen feet long, nine feet wide, and twelve feet high. A good example of the early type of oratory is found at Gallerus in Kerry.

The earliest buildings were made without cement, and with undressed masonry, and the transition to the cemented walls and dressed stones of the later buildings took place in the period dating from the sixth to the eighth century. The doorway of the churches built at this time was constructed of very large stones, which inclined inwards towards the top, with a great horizontal lintel stone. They had a round-headed or arched eastern window, the arch being scooped out of the stone, or a pointed window. They consisted at first of a single chamber, but as time went on a chancel was often added at the east end, and the churches became gradually larger and more ornamental.

Native architecture in Ireland reached its highest development in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, in the style known as Irish Romanesque. We learn from the remains of many of the churches which were built before this period that a distinct style of building prevailed in the country at the time when the Romanesque architecture was introduced from Normandy. "Rude,"





Doorway of St. Farannan's Church, Donaghmore.

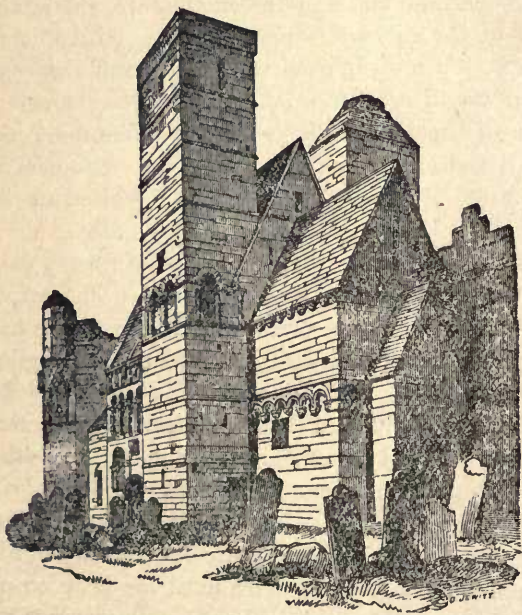


says Miss Stokes, "as many of its examples are, this primitive architecture still had sufficient character and vitality to modify the incoming Romanesque, and to live on manifesting itself, notwithstanding the fresh forms grafted upon it." The Irish Romanesque therefore exhibits native traditions handed down from earlier native buildings, pagan and Christian, and is characterised by the horizontal lintel of the entablature, the retention of the inclined jambs of the primitive doorways, rich and delicate decoration, and the constant use of certain ornamental designs characteristic of the late Celtic period. The churches are small and have a simple ground plan. A splendid example of Irish Romanesque Architecture is found in King Cormac's chapel at Cashel.

Much has been written about the origin and date of the round towers which are such a distinctive feature in our native architecture. Dr. Petrie has fixed the date of their erection from a period ranging from the sixth to the thirteenth century, and he has firmly established their ecclesiastical character. They were used as belfries, and as places where the inhabitants of a monastery might retire with their most treasured possessions in case of a sudden attack. The Irish ecclesiastic had possessed his church in comparative peace until the invasion of the Northmen, but when they first commenced to make their inroads into the country, and to show their bitterest hatred towards everything that sprung from Christianity, the monks found it



necessary to protect their churches and cells by means of this lofty tower. Its great height, and its small doorway, generally about fourteen feet from the ground, enabled them to resist the attacks of an enemy chiefly armed with bows and arrows.



Cormac's Chapel, Rock of Cashel.





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